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THE MAGAZINE OF ENTERTAINMENT

SEPT. 1924

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Occupation.....

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Sept.
1925

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. LVI
No. 1

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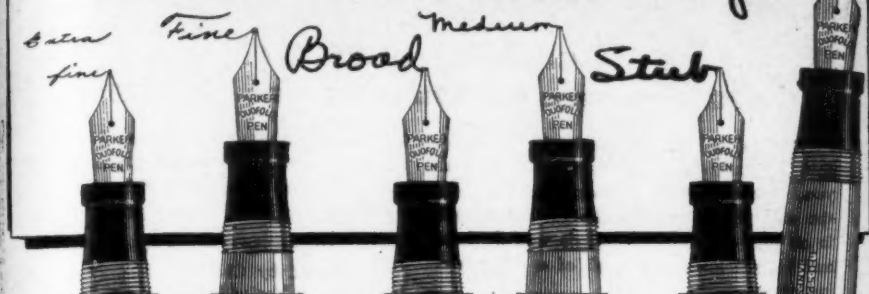
Monthly publication issued by Ainslee's Magazine Co., Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Copyright, 1925, by Ainslee's Magazine Co., New York. Copyright, 1925, by Ainslee's Magazine Co., Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 11, 1902, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$2.86. Foreign, \$3.22.

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Guaranteed, like the five other Duofold Points, for 25 Years
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PARKER now introduces in the handsome Duofold Pen a point that produces a style in handwriting full of new interest and charm.

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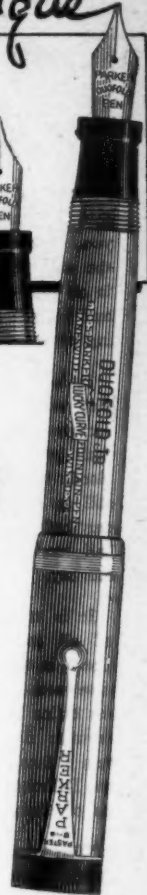
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of the Scarlet
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Hard to put your fingers on it, isn't it?—this fascination that good fiction throws over you. There's something almost abnormal about the man or the woman who can't sink back in an easy-chair when the day's work is done, and become lost in the spell of a swift-moving adventure story.

It is a fine and comforting thing to know that we Americans have never lost the love for romance. We would have become a dull, drab people otherwise. Romance is in our blood, breath of our very breath. We are still an adventuring, pioneering people, despite our bathtubs and radios and telephones and "all modern conveniences," as the real-estate ads say.

It is true of all walks of American life, of all sorts and conditions of our people. Down in the parched flatlands of Oklahoma I have seen cow-punchers waiting eagerly for the trains that bring the latest copies of their favorite fiction magazines and books. And then I have seen New York business men enter Pullmans at the Grand Central with copies of these same books under their arms.

"Tell me a story," is one of the first requests of childhood, and the child's love for story-telling has never grown out of most of us, for which we may thank our lucky stars.

Some one has called the big brick building at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, "Story-teller's headquarters." It shelters one of the oldest and best-established publishing concerns in America—Chelsea House Publishers. There come the leading fiction writers of the country with their best work, hot from the typewriters. There are editors with their fingers always on the pulse of the public, who know what you and I like to read and see that we get it. Whether the book that comes from

the Chelsea House presses costs \$2 or only 75 cents, you may be sure that you have between its covers the sort of writing that makes the best of reading. For example—

GOLDEN ISLE, by Roland Ashford Phillips, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

It begins with a group of friends gathered together in the cabin of that most remarkable of yachts, *The Nautilus*; with the shriek of the siren at Sing Sing prison on the Hudson River warning that a dangerous criminal has escaped, and how this most exciting of treasure-hunting stories ends, I leave to your own discovery. At all events you may be sure that there's not a dull page in this book which takes you out onto the high seas to an island as crammed with adventure as was Stevenson's "Treasure Island."



THE SCARLET SCOURGE, by Johnston McCulley, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

There were a number of persons who might have shot Lorenzo Brayton through the back as he sat at his desk in the offices of his fraudulent rubber stock-selling company. It was up to Detective Sam Haynes to find the one hand that directed the fatal shot. Mr. McCulley takes you, the reader, along with Sam on his way through the labyrinth that finally leads to the light, and he does it in masterly fashion. A bang-up, thrilling detective story of the first water.



ANNE AGAINST THE WORLD, by Victor Thorne, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Victor Thorne tells a beautiful love story

(Continued on 2nd page following.)

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FATIMA

what a whale of a
difference just a
few cents make

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in this book with enough adventure in it to satisfy the most ardent thrill hunter. Anne faces the problem that confronts every one of us—what is really worth while in this world? She leaves her humble little home to enter the bizarre life of a manicuring establishment. Her wistful beauty brings many men to her, some good, some bad, but at length she finds true love. It is a clean, well-written love story that Mr. Thorne tells, one that you will read through to the very end with the keenest interest.



THE BOSS OF CAMP FOUR, by Ewart Kinsburn, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Mr. Kinsburn is rapidly coming to the forefront of the few who can write convincingly of the great West. Here he paints unforgettable scenes against a New Mexican background. His hero is Chet Fanning, and he's the sort of hero that makes you want to cheer as he fights the battles of "Spookmule" Paxton, who bought twenty thousand acres and then found a lot of trouble on his hands. There's an adventure in a tunnel in this book which makes one of the big thrills of modern fiction.



WATCHED OUT, by Eugene A. Clancy, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Wall Street and huge sums of money, a crooked gang, led by the veteran of many a furious fight. Out of these ingredients you have in "Watched Out" the sort of adventure story that makes you forget all engagements until you have come to the very end. The battle of wits between Monk Markheim, gangster and woman hater, and young John Gore, who made big money on the Street, and then—for a while—dropped out of the public's eye, makes a swift-moving yarn that is told by Mr. Clancy with force and humor.



THE HUSKS OF LIFE, by Mary Douglas, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Many a modern author has chosen as a fic-

tion theme the colorful, bohemian life of the artists' studios of New York's Greenwich Village. Few have presented this life as faithfully as does the author of "The Husks of Life." Mary Douglas depicts for us the adventures of Jennie Joyce, who is forced to leave the factory because of the unwelcome attentions of her boss and becomes a model to one of the city's best-known artists. Jennie meets many types of men, but finally finds that one alone is worthy of love. The story marches to its triumphant conclusion in stirring manner.



JERRY PEYTON'S NOTCHED INHERITANCE, by David Manning, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

When the doctor told old Hank Peyton that he was about to die, Hank took another drink and called for his son, Jerry. To him he handed over his most precious treasure, the revolver, known and feared by Mexicans as "The Voice of La Paloma." That was Jerry's inheritance, his commission to a free life, and the way he used it makes an exceptionally interesting Western story, told as Mr. Manning knows how to tell these rousing yarns.



THE BIGAMIST, by John Jay Chichester, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, 320 pages, Price \$2.

Some of the foremost literary reviews of the country, among them that of the *New York Times*, have been loud in their praises of this most remarkable book. Mr. Chichester, author of "The Porcelain Mask," knows how to tell a most complicated story and still hold the attention of his readers every moment. This time he introduces us to one "Wiggly" Price, lovable newspaper reporter, who takes up a murder trail where the detective leaves off and covers himself and his paper with glory. There is action aplenty in this story, mystery and enough romance to please every one.

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By R. K. Culver

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Agents and Help Wanted—Continued

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INVENTORS—Write for our guide book "How to Get Your Patent" and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for inspection and instructions free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 61, Washington, D. C.

Detectives Wanted

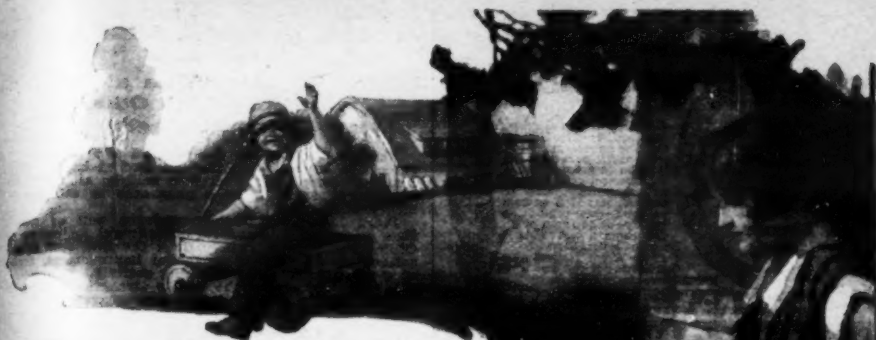
MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel make secret investigations; reports; salaries expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write, George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1969 Broadway, New York.

Stammering

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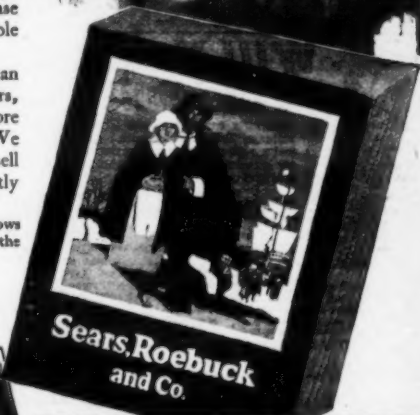
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World's Largest Store



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Postoffice

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State.....

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Your Spare Pennies will pay for this Diamond Ring

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Show it to your friends and neighbors as a sample of our fine quality, hand-tailored **All-Wool Suits**, guaranteed \$40 values at amazing low price of \$23.50, take their orders, keep handsome profit for yourself and send orders to us.

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Write name and address below and mail at once.

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Burlington Watch Company
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Dept. 14-16 Chicago, Illinois

LAW

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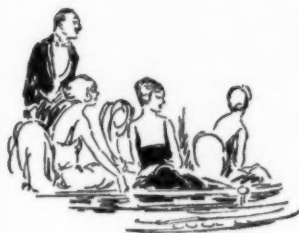
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. LVI.

SEPTEMBER, 1925.

No. 1.



Where He Bowed

By Warren E. Schutt

Author of "Madame Nitouche,"
"The Long, Long Arm," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WITH Rossiter Byrne's telephone message to her from the Union Station announcing to her his safe arrival in Washington after a forced journey from beyond the Danube, Laura Buchanan felt that the winter of her discontent must be over. In retrospect now, with the relaxing of her nervous tension, it seemed to her to have been an intolerable winter—yes, and autumn, too, going back to the time of her mother's death. She wondered now suddenly how she had ever endured it and kept up her place as well as she had done in that most exigent part of Washington society.

First she had to force herself to accept, for her father's sake, the establishment of Domenica Fitzui in Washington—a business really all right and sound and desirable, and no one's affair but her father's, but a business which all Washington made its own in its own peculiar way. And on top of that came this affair of Rossiter Byrne's, the reported facts of which, hot over the journalistic cables, were broadcast in every newspaper from Maine to Mexico, and which furnished Washington with the most delightful morsel of imaginative gossip it had had since a certain ambassador's reputed wife was discov-

ered to be far less than that—or more, whichever point of view you cared to take.

Of course, neither her father's affair with Domenica Fitzui, nor Rossiter Byrne's still nebulous disgrace, would have been of so much importance if the Buchanans had been less than they were in Washington society; if Laureltop, the Buchanans' magnificent estate away out Massachusetts Avenue Extended, hereditary in the family time out of mind, had been less a traditional Mecca for all the best of Washington in formal functions and for delightful informalities as well; or if Domenica had not so openly made herself part of the Buchanan entourage; or if Rossiter Byrne had inspired less public promise of achievement in his career; or, indeed, if her engagement to Byrne, announced just before her mother's death, hadn't been heralded as the most desirable and the most auspicious match of the season.

But, all ifs aside, the conditions held as they were. And Ross Byrne's affair was a mess indeed.

The cabled facts—the known facts—were these: After five months of residence as first secretary in charge of the American legation in one of those new Balkan states, the identity of which must here be but barely concealed under the

name of Styria, Ross Byrne had been attacked in his apartment by a young and—so reports had it—very lovely woman of unknown derivation who, after trying in vain to disfigure him by throwing vitriol at him, had herself committed suicide and died in his arms before the local police could force their way in. Byrne offered no explanations to the public. What passed between him and the state department few people knew.

To Laura he had cabled:

Leaving at once under orders to return to Washington and explain to state department if explanation is possible.

That, and no more than that. No explanations to her, no denial of implications, no plea for her continued faith in him. Only waiting for him, and waiting with silent tongue and brave eyes that met inquiring words and offers of sympathy. If he could only have guessed what she suffered from the suspense—but then, it is very likely that Ross did not know to what extent it had been made public in the States; did not know what had been published about him, nor what people thought and imagined.

Yet Byrne's first speech to her over the telephone, promising to come out to breakfast as quickly as the Buchanan chauffeur, who had been sent down for him, could be urged to drive, had sounded cheerful enough, inspiring enough—not at all that of a guilty philanderer, nor of a man come home to fight for the continuation of a career that was as life itself to him, with the known chances indicating the grave possibility of his dishonorable dismissal.

Her father, with a fine sympathy understanding that they two would want to be alone for a time at their first meeting, had gone earlier than usual for his matutinal ride in Rock Creek Park, declaring his sole reason for his departure from habit was that he had to be earlier than usual at his offices in the Treasury

Building that morning. Basil Buchanan's life, so far as his daughter could remember it, had been, it seemed to her, a tacit proof of his complete sympathy with her in all ways little and big. That fact, to return for a moment to Domenica Fitzui, was but an added reason for her acceptance of Madame Fitzui, since it was mute evidence of his great love for the engaging, dark-skinned little foreign woman.

But the affair of Domenica faded from Laura's mind for an hour, at least, with Ross Byrne's coming. In her impatience she decided to go down to the veranda to meet him. Before she left her room, however, she caught a last glimpse of herself in the mirror—not so much to see whether she looked lovely, but rather to see whether, with the great lightening of her spirits, she had not changed utterly since Ross had telephoned.

And as she looked, she smiled at her own mental conceit; and was therefore inclined to think that she had in fact changed. Grateful for it, of course. She had come to fear, what with the ravages of the trials of these past months, that she might become more and more like her mother, who, the physical counterpart of herself, had been nevertheless glittering and aloof in her blond perfection, austere in her very magnificence. Lately she had feared that she had seen developing in her own blue eyes and on her really lovely face, a trace of her mother's distant and emotionless self-masking, induced in herself, perhaps, by this winter's constant steeling of herself against gossip and innuendo—some glittering invulnerability which, she was sure in retrospect, had robbed her mother of all chance of living to the full. That protective covering, if it had begun to grow, she knew she must throw off at all costs if life were to yield to her what she imagined it might be made to yield. It was with that resolution fresh and strong within

her, that she went down to meet Ross Byrne.

The early spring morning seemed to her a brilliant, golden augury. Three or four times she walked the length of the columned veranda, overlooking the sweep of fresh-green lawn and shrubbery, down to the domes of the city and the sheen of the lazy river. The languor of the scent of late lilacs and the promise of honeysuckles could not rob the air of a vitalizing freshness. She had brought a cigarette down with her, but threw it away rather impatiently as she walked slowly up and down.

The car came in an incredibly short space of time, it seemed. Byrne abandoned to waiting servants all his luggage but an imposing-looking brief bag; and, swinging this, sprang up the steps to meet her. She, upon seeing him, owned herself instantly, almost overwhelmingly solicitous for his lack of usually healthy color, for the tired expression in his fine eyes, for the droop of his athletic shoulders as compared with what they had been when last she saw him. And in that same glance of hers which, in the space of an eye wink, had gathered all essential details of his appearance, sought in vain for marks of the vitriol burning. She found relief in that absence of material evidence; perhaps the whole story had been a journalistic fabrication.

Muffled greetings, during which she was not at all like her mother. And then:

"You're famished, of course," she said.

He laughed.

"Meaning famished for food? Well, perhaps I am, though I'd not thought about it."

"Come along. I'm having breakfast put in the sun parlor. I wanted a long talk with you, and it's pleasanter sitting there, than anywhere else."

"You sound terrifyingly serious. Perhaps I should have breakfasted at

the station, to fortify myself against the inquisition."

"Sorry! I'll not ask you any questions until——"

He interrupted her almost vehemently.

"Laura, tell me this: Has it made things so terribly difficult for you—this queer business of mine?"

"Ross, you've no idea!"

"Damn!" was all he said, but his lips twitched oddly.

"But I am relieved. It's quite all right, isn't it? There's no vitriol, is there? And since they exaggerated that——"

"And they reported even that, eh? I guess, though," he went on, grave of face, "that there's not been much ex-aggregation. Tell me what they've been saying about it all."

Laura ordered service first, and led the way into the glass-inclosed porch at the rear of the east wing. And as they walked together, she told him very briefly, and factually, what the newspapers had said.

A servant came in with the breakfast things. Byrne stood looking out the window while the servant stayed there, as if he were digesting all she had told him. Then, when they were alone again, he turned to her.

"It all is true," he said.

She looked at him as if she had been grievously hurt.

"But—all of it? She was found in your arms?"

"Yes. What could one do? Poor devil, she wanted comfort. It all meant nothing. You must know that, Laura."

"But you've explanations, of course."

"Yes, I have. I really shouldn't tell any one before I have made my report to the state department. But of course I shall tell you. It's all in the utmost confidence."

"Naturally, Ross. You probably never knew her, or—or——"

"Yes, I knew her. Not personally,

but by sight, by repute. Never exchanged a word with her in my life. People in Groessbruck knew her as the friend of Federigo Brasol. That's only hearsay. I never exchanged a word with her in my life until she came early that morning to me, and was admitted by my servant on a false pretense."

"Who is Federigo Brasol?"

"You've never heard of him? Still, that's not unlikely, after all. I think your father must know him. He's one of those strange, extremely powerful figures who have come up in Continental Europe as a result of the war. Vastly rich, vastly powerful. One of those men who seem to have their own way with money and with women—yes, and with governments, too. He virtually controls at least two of those new governments south of the Danube that have arisen out of the old, reorganized Balkan states."

"And she was his—his friend?" Laura asked. "But why on earth should she have come to you, and—"

"Of all that I haven't the faintest notion. No, I can't say that. I have my own explanation for it, but there are no facts to back up my opinion."

"But what did she say to you? She must have said something."

"She begged me to befriend her."

"Ross! And you had never before known her?"

"Never. Never exchanged a word with her before. Never seen her at closer range than in her carriage in the Orangerie Strasse. So far as I know, she had never seen me, never known who I was."

"Why, it's all—why, Ross, almost incredible."

"Of course. You see where it puts me. That's what all the world will think. I told you in my cable that I doubted if I could make any explanation that the state department could accept. It looks as if everything had been smashed for me."

"But what do you yourself think of it all?"

"Ah, that's a different story. I pretty well know myself what to think. But to make any one else believe what I think—that is, any one but you and your father—that is another affair altogether. To my mind, it is no more than an extremely ingenious plan on the part of Federigo Brasol to get me out of Groessbruck, and out of the service altogether—a discredited, dishonored man."

"Oh, he is your enemy?"

"Not openly. Secretly. Best of friends on the face of it. But he knows that I know what a scoundrel he is. And he knows that I would combat certain policies of his in Styria with all my official power. He had to get me out of the place. He could do it only by having me proved *persona non grata* by the existing government. And he couldn't do that by any fair means. So he took foul means. And certainly he could have taken no surer means."

"But, Ross, I mean," she began haltingly, "it seems still so incredible—such lengths—such a sacrifice—"

"I know it does. But there's no other possible explanation," he said vehemently. "And even this is so impossible that I doubt if the state department can swallow it, or absolve me on the strength of it. And I've absolutely no way to prove it."

Laura was thoughtful for a long time, and then, with a sigh, she said:

"I suppose we can only abide by the event. How long before you will know what action the state department—"

"Of that I've no idea, of course. I must go down this morning as soon as the offices open, to report that I'm here. I'll probably have an appointment made for me for an official hearing. I can only hope it comes soon."

"And I."

"It really must have been dreadful for you to live through, Laura."

"Yes, dear, I'll have to admit it. Coming as it did on top of father's affair — Still, you don't know anything about that, yet."

"Your father's affair? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've been silly about that, I suppose," she said in a sudden burst of unrestraint. "It's so small, after all, as compared with your trouble. But it's all so strange—this affair of father's; at least, it must sound so to every one else."

Byrne laughed indulgently.

"I imagine it won't sound so strange to me, whatever it is. Your father could never be anything but right, Laura, and I've known him longer than you have."

Laura sipped her coffee thoughtfully.

"Yes, Ross, but men—and perhaps especially men of father's age, and status, and—and long starvation, if you like, for you know what mother was as well as I know—oh, I scarcely know how to put it, Ross, but such men are likely to be taken in by women, and I am so afraid people will think he has been. That's the chief reason why it has been so hard for me to accept it all."

"So that's it," Byrne said gravely.

"Yes, and——"

"But do you think he has been taken in?"

Laura's denial could not have been more convincing.

"Oh, no; anything but that! She's simply perfect imperfection, if you know what I mean. Perfect, that is, as the woman father needs to complete his life; imperfect by most of your formal conventions. And she is a dear. And he does so much love her."

Byrne laughed in mild fun-making.

"Well, then," he said, as if that were quite enough to say.

"But you don't yet understand why it has been so very difficult for me. I've not yet told you. You see, she volunteers no information at all about

herself, and father gives out none. I gather that he must have met her when he was in Europe on the peace commission. All this intervening time he has never told a soul about her, yet he must have been continually in touch with her. Then, as soon as mother died—oh, not three months afterward—he quite casually told me that he loved her, and that he proposed to bring her to America immediately to marry her as soon as decency permitted. As for me, I never could believe that father could love below his station, and I don't think he has. But here in Washington, where everybody has to know everything, and talks like mad if not everything is known—and she with father continually, running in and out here as if she belonged completely—why, it's been terrifically hard for me. At least, Ross," she added as if for sake of scrupulous exactitude, "until people get to know her."

Again Byrne smiled.

"And when people get to know her?"

Now she seemed a little loath to answer, as if she realized now that in some degree she had been making mountains from molehills.

"Why, then it's all right, of course. Then she, being just what she is, being just Domenica Fitzui, seems to explain everything beautifully."

"And there you are," said Byrne.

"But she has no background at all. She's an exquisite little pagan, perfectly bred, knows every one and has been everywhere, and yet no one knows anything at all about her. She's Domenica Fitzui, and no more than that."

"And that, from what you say," smiled Byrne, "could be quite enough to know, I should think."

"You're comforting, if not very convincing. I know you're half making fun of me. To tell you the whole truth, I started out by enduring it, like a self-martyr, for father's sake, because I do know that he loves her tremendously.

and she him. And then, enduring it for his sake only, I've come to care a vast amount for her. And so I want you to like her, too, if you can."

"I can imagine it won't be so very difficult."

After that they talked generally for a few minutes of such intimate and tangential affairs as chance led them into, after this six months of communication by letter only. Then abruptly Byrne, who faced the driveway, announced:

"There's your father coming now, and—is that Madame Fitzui with him?"

Laura looked out.

"Domenica—yes, of course. She's met father in the park. Perhaps she always does meet him, though she's never before come to breakfast with him."

"And, by Jove, how she sits her horse! And what a horse she has to sit! What is it? Where did she get it?"

"She brought it with her from Europe. Irish, I believe I've heard her say. What do you think of her, Ross?"

"At first sight I should say that she—well, explains herself beautifully." Byrne laughed.

CHAPTER II.

Byrne faced this unexpected meeting somewhat on the defensive. To Basil Buchanan alone, he would have told his version of that strange affair quite as frankly—with even more frankness—than he had told it to Laura. The three of them together had always seemed a family in themselves. But the interloping of this strange woman put a seal upon his lips, not from any fear of her unreliability, but from caution alone. Her coming to the house this morning, by Laura's confession an unusual procedure, seemed to him at the least to be a manifestation of curiosity concerning him, if not concerning that

execrable business in Styria. And he prepared himself, as he heard their footsteps approaching through the hall, to resent, with his impregnable if velvety tact, any direct inquiries, or even suggestions of morbid curiosity.

But his defense was forgotten in a great surprise even as Domenica entered the room. Domenica Fitzui was none other than the prototype of that extraordinary painting of Ypollita's that hung in Federigo Brasol's private gallery in Groessbruck. Incredible to him at first! Without realizing that he must have betrayed his amazement, he studied her during those few steps they both took in meeting. The same lustrous mass of coppery hair, the same perfection of olive skin, the same long-lashed blue eyes, the same haunting vitality of figure which the excessive décolletage of the portrait had made to live forever, and which could not now be concealed in the model, in spite of the stiffness of white stock which she wore, and the preciseness of the lines of her cross-saddle coat, and the slight cumbrousness of boots however well made. Portrait and woman—they were the same beyond all manner of doubt.

A flood of caution came upon him. She had not revealed her past to the Buchanans. That meant that she had preferred not to. What a cad he would make of himself if he betrayed her now by his inexcusable staring at her! How long had his amazement endured? he asked himself. Not long enough, not patently enough, he hoped, that the Buchanans should perceive it, and think, if not ask, questions. Yet he could not now take his eyes from her to resolve his doubts by a swift glance at Buchanan and Laura, for already her hand was raised to his. He donned his iron mask of a swift smile, and was aware of her ingenuous graciousness to him.

"I am very selfish, you see," she was saying to him. "I could not leave you

two alone. I had to come back with Basil, to know you at least as soon as he saw you. I do hope you'll both forgive me for my interloping."

Byrne was conscious now of some suave allurements of gesture in her, some bland healing quality of voice which were of themselves translated to him as expressions of an unique womanliness.

"On the contrary," he assured her, "I think you must have guessed at my eagerness to know you, and so have been charitable enough to cater to it."

"I can fancy now," she smiled at him. "that you must have acquitted yourself very well in Styria."

Was that speech of hers an opening to the rest of the affair, he asked himself, or a mere return of the meaningless compliment? At any rate, Basil Buchanan, towering behind her, never so upright in his stalwartness, nor so clear and young-eyed in spite of the gray hair and mustache, spoke up with ill-restrained cordiality.

"Infernally glad to see you, Ross, and that is no exaggeration."

Byrne knew very well now that Buchanan had read nothing in that amazement he feared he had betrayed when first he saw Domenica.

"You are very good, both of you," he said in real gratitude; and instantly took his first occasion to turn to Laura, to see whether she had gathered any suspicion from that temporary let-down of his usual social mask.

His glance at Laura told him nothing. She was smiling at them both, with a meaningless, aloof smile that he had never before perceived upon her face, and which he had no difficulty in identifying as a mannerism of her mother's.

Laura covered the next moment by urging them to immediate coffee. Domenica took up the conversation, as they sat down, by the usual inquiries about his passage across and the news of Paris and all the other tangential

and inconsequential things that make up the welcome home. Laura seemed rather subdued throughout it, in spite of Domenica's bringing her into it. Byrne saw her looking often at and gravely scrutinizing Domenica; though perhaps no oftener than she looked at him. Byrne gathered that there was still a conflict within Laura between the maternal and the paternal influences, with Domenica as the first *casus belli* the girl had known; and he rather shrewdly guessed that, the cause of the war being what it was, she would herself turn the victory to the paternal side of the house. At any rate, there was something about Domenica that seemed to impose bland contentment on any one who laid himself open and with sympathy to her influence, and Byrne himself was rather vividly conscious of the fact.

As the morning sun came higher, however, he began to be impatient to report himself at the state department, as was his duty. And since they talked on, with no hint of breaking up the party, he presently took it upon himself to suggest the course of his duty.

With which hint Domenica arose abruptly.

"Of course, of course," she said. "I am using your car, am I not, Basil?" And without awaiting his reply, she hurried on: "I am going down to my suite at the Willard immediately. I can as well as not drop you at the state department, and Basil's car can call for you on the way back. Would that not be satisfactory?"

Byrne felt it not his place to reply. Buchanan was a little disappointed, one could not fail to see, but he approved of the plan, and had the car ordered. Laura said nothing, but continued her scrutiny of Domenica. Then Byrne added his own grateful acceptance of the plan.

They two were away within five minutes. Her vivaciousness seemed to have

been dissipated. She lighted a thoughtful cigarette as the car wound down the driveway. Byrne waited for her to speak.

"You've seen me before, haven't you?" she asked with startling directness.

"No." And that was the truth, though Byrne felt uneasy at having failed to qualify his negative.

"Please don't try to mislead me. I realize your tactfulness and am grateful for it. But you have seen me before. I knew it the instant I saw you—or rather the instant you recognized me. And, as between us, tactfulness can have no place, unfortunately."

"I've not seen you, but I've seen Ypollita's painting of you."

She laughed ironically.

"Of the Marchesa di Castiglione, you mean."

Honestly Byrne made his response:

"Then you are not the same?"

"Yes, we are the same, and you know it. May I ask where you saw the portrait?"

He hesitated a moment.

"In Federigo Brasol's salon."

"Why did you not speak of it this morning, then?"

Byrne knew himself at a complete loss for any satisfactory reply.

She relieved him of embarrassment rather generously.

"I can tell you the answer to that, of course. Laura led you to believe that I was here in some fashion incognito, if not under too mysterious pretenses. Brasol told you things about the Marchesa di Castiglione. Putting the two things together, you, with your unstudied decency, simply let the matter drop without comment as being, perhaps, what I most wanted done. Is not that right?"

"Thanks very much for explaining the inexplicable. I think you are right."

She thought for a moment.

"It is clear that I am in good hands,

at least; also that I may depend on you as a friend."

"Thanks again. I hope I may prove worthy of it."

"That's so formal and stilted, coming from you to me. I know you are worthy of it, and so do you know it. I am really very grateful. But what did Brasol tell you about me?"

"What almost every one sees who sees the portrait knows—that you are very lovely."

"But what thing of importance did he tell you?"

"Does one remember all conversation of occasional dinners?"

"But if the portrait made such an impression upon you——"

He had to laugh a little.

"You are clever. I perceive that you really want the truth. Brasol said that you were a discarded favorite of his."

"He lied."

"So I perceive now."

"Thanks. You are far too generous. But did you believe it at the time? Do you believe it now? I mean, really believe it, quite apart from pretty speeches?"

"His—yes, boasts—were, to me, no more than one of those idle vagaries about which one doesn't stop to consider whether they are true or not."

She retorted passionately:

"Please, please, do not dodge my questions. It is of vital importance to me—the truth. Fate has thrown us together in odd fashion. I must rely on you as my only friend in all this. Did you—do you believe what Brasol said about me?"

Byrne was grave of face now. He said quietly:

"I told you the truth before. I paid no attention whatever to what he said. If it had been true, I envied him. I perhaps doubted him more than I envied him. Yes, I can say that. At any rate, I know that his boasts came always after his usual indulgences in the

very excellent Tokay he managed to lay in from some source. So you see——"

"I don't know what you believe. I tell you what he says is a lie. I want you to believe that it was a lie."

"Your commands in this respect are very simple of execution."

"Some time I'll tell you everything. There isn't time now. You might not believe—but you must. It was—was the only thing for me to do at the time."

"I want no explanations."

That seemed to calm her—or at least to relax a little the tension under which she had labored, however little she had given superficial evidence of it. She changed the subject slightly.

"Did you know Brasol well?"

"Too well."

"You were friends?"

"Socially—professionally, if you like. One had to be a friend of Brasol's in Groessbruck."

"Yes, of course one would, in your position. How queer! How incredibly fatal it all is."

"What is queer, or what fatal?"

"You, knowing Brasol, so close to the Buchanans. Is it fate? It's pusillanimous to fear your fate, isn't it? But I don't fear it. I may rely on you, may I not?" Incomprehensible sequence of exclamations, to which Byrne could not answer by more than a blanket "Yes."

"Tell me," she went on, talking always as much to herself, it seemed, as to him. "How is Brasol? Well?"

"Well enough when I left Groessbruck," he said grimly.

"And I thought I had put him forever out of my life. Well, I have, so far as that is concerned. Have I not? I have a statue of him in my apartment. No one has seen it. You shall see it some time, now that you know. I spend hours detesting it, and fearing it, and wondering—and wondering. Yet I am safe, am I not? What, is this the state department already? I hadn't an idea—

won't you come with me to my apartment? I want you to see the statue of Brasol—ghastly thing. I had Montvries do it in Paris to my design, from a photograph which I burned."

"May I not call upon you some other time? I really should report at the earliest possible moment——"

"Oh, yes, of course. I'd rather you came some other time. I want to be alone now for a time. I like you immensely. I can rely on you, can I not? And I do want you to come and see me. I'll set a time soon."

She caught his hand, not in the ordinary manner of shaking hands at leave-taking, but one of his in both hers, as if she were indeed clinging to him for protection against the ugly cloud that appeared upon her hitherto golden horizon. Then she opened the door of the limousine herself and thrust him out with a little laugh.

"And your very sense of duty reassures me—though, of course, you have no duty toward me. Now go, and I shall be very glad to see you again, you may depend upon it."

All of which left Byrne in a bit of a maze. Through the long corridors of the great, gloomy building he threaded absently, finding it for the first time far less of a labyrinth than his mental state. Much as he had desired to present his case quickly, he suddenly disliked to plunge into it. He merely left a card on the secretary, made to the head of the bureau a formal notification of his arrival in Washington with request for an official interview at the secretary's convenience, and returned to the street to find Buchanan's car awaiting him. To the chauffeur he gave the simple order: "To Mr. Buchanan's."

Buchanan himself had gone to his offices by the time Byrne reached Laureltop. Laura, waiting for him, seemed on the surface to be quite herself; but Byrne had to confess that that "self" of hers was somehow not quite

what it had been. Not change enough to charge her with it, or even to warrant serious thought, but a sure change for all its subtlety.

"Do tell me, Ross, did you like Domenica alone as well as you seemed to like her with the rest of us?"

"Quite. She's delightful."

A moment of silence. Then she said disarmingly:

"Do you know, Ross, I thought, from the way you looked at her when first you met her, that you had seen her before somewhere."

Byrne wondered that his lips did not twitch.

"No, you are mistaken. I have never seen her before this morning."

She was far from satisfied.

"But I was so sure, from the way you looked at her——"

"Sorry, but—I can only repeat myself."

She seemed rather disappointed.

"Then that settles that," she said with a little laugh. "I thought—— Oh, Ross, I don't know why I am so morbidly curious about her. It is only because father so much loves her, and I feel that I must know that he is happy, and will be happy."

"Aren't you pretty well convinced of it already, Laura?"

"Yes, I am, only——"

"And that being so"—he laughed—"what shall we do with the rest of the day? How is Chevy Chase? Open yet? The greens must be dry by this time."

"Oh, yes. Shall we go out there for lunch? I'll take you on, Ross, if you'll give me a stroke a hole."

"Can't do that with safety, I'm afraid. Haven't had a club in my hands since I left Washington before."

"Poor man! What a place Groessbruck must be."

"It is, my dear, I give you my word."

And so he overcame her bafflement. They spent the whole afternoon over

thirty-six holes, and returned to find Basil Buchanan waiting for them over tea. He had an amazing announcement to make.

"I'd never thought about it before, Ross, but you must have known Federico Brasol in Styria."

"You knew him, too, did you not?" Byrne countered.

"Yes; I met him in Budapest on the financial commission. He's in Washington. Did you know?"

"In Washington? No, I didn't know it. When, and for what?"

Byrne found Laura's eyes fixed upon him. She knew of Brasol's putative connection with his own affair. What if she knew of this immensely greater complication?

"He arrived this morning, on his private yacht, direct out of Brest. First time a private yacht has been anchored in the Potomac Basin in years, that I remember."

Laura spoke up with a sudden conviction.

"He's come, Ross, to——"

But Byrne's eyes warned her to silence. Basil Buchanan did not yet know of Brasol's suspected connection with his own affair; now, more than ever, did he want to keep Buchanan in ignorance of it. He covered Laura's lacuna with a quick interruption of his own:

"And he looked you up already? That augurs well for his——"

"No, not me directly. Nikola Senlis, in charge of the Styrian legation here, did that. Senlis doesn't much like him, to be sure, but owes him some entertainment for sake of his official head. And Senlis wants us all to come to dinner at the legation to-morrow night, to meet Brasol. No one else in Washington whom Brasol knows. Rather quick notice, but it appears that Brasol may not be here more than a day or two."

"Did he ask me?" Byrne asked.

"Oh, yes; all of us, provided we can make it handily."

"But how did he know that I had returned?" Byrne wanted to know, for sake of settling certain questions of his own.

"Oh, I told Senlis you were back, and probably had known Brasol abroad."

Byrne was disappointed. He had hoped that Brasol had specifically asked for him. This other route for the invitation was too fortuitous to mean anything after all.

Buchanan talked on:

"I accepted for all of us except you, Ross, if for any reason you don't care to go. Senlis seemed very eager, and I wanted to do him the favor. I remember, Laura, your saying that we hadn't anything on to-morrow night except the British embassy at ten for dancing, and Domenica has already accepted. I telephoned her just before you came in."

Byrne scarcely trusted the evidence of his ears. Domenica going to meet Brasol! Incredible indeed! And yet, as he tried to put himself in her place, he realized that she could not have refused without raising questions. She was forced to accept. What a dinner it would be!

He heard Buchanan talking:

"And you are the only one still holding out, Ross."

"Oh, I shall go," Byrne said.

CHAPTER III.

Domenica came to them for dinner that night—an intimate, rather informal affair, with a theater party to follow, for some of Buchanan's personal friends. Byrne was eager to find some occasion to speak with her in confidence, to resolve his own anxiety concerning her prospective dinner with Brasol. But no opportunity presented itself; in fact, it looked to him as if she purposely evaded being alone with him, though he

was sure that, when they first met that evening, she had flashed to him some message which he could not interpret.

Throughout the dinner he watched her with curiosity, with admiration. He could perceive no sign that she felt the ordeal that impended over her from out of a blue sky; and that in spite of the fact that Buchanan, in his innocence, turned the conversation early into the channel of Federigo Brasol, his malign influence in Europe, and his mysterious arrival in Washington. She did not keep out of the conversation. Never that! Byrne marveled at her ability. All her share in the talk was precisely that of a woman who knew Brasol at least by reputation, as any woman of her standing must know him. No one could have gathered that she knew Brasol in person at all; on the other hand, no one could look back and impute to her, from anything she had said, that she did not know him intimately. All told, an admirably judged preparation for whatever the event of the following night.

A remarkable woman!

But as Byrne helped her into the car on the way to the theater, he was conscious that she had slipped a note into his hand. He concealed it with admirable efficiency, but found no time to read it until the first entr'acte. It was hastily written, in French as her most convenient language, on the back of a blank check, which probably represented the most convenient bit of paper at hand to her need.

What is this incredible business of Brasol's being in Washington? I accepted because I had to. Is it a joke? I must know more about it. If it be true, which God forbid, will you please try to find Brasol, and learn why he is here, and why this invitation has come to me? I am relying on you yet. There seems no one else for me to rely on. Come to see me to-morrow at twelve and tell me what I may expect. Please say nothing of me to him, but try to get his address so that I may communicate with him before to-morrow night's dinner, if I perceive the need of it.

No simple undertaking—this she had laid upon him. Yet it was one which Byrne entered upon with a sort of grim gratefulness that he had been pushed into it. In the back of his mind he was sure that Brasol had made this incredible trip to Washington only to witness—or perhaps even to assist in—his own discomfiture; in some mysterious way to clinch his dismissal from the service. This urge that drove him immediately into an open clash with the man was therefore much to his liking.

He tore the note into tiny shreds, standing apart from the swirl in the men's smoking room. There was still time during the entr'acte to make his first step toward an instant interview with Brasol. He threw away his cigarette and found a public telephone booth, whence he telephoned the Styrian legation. Lucky shot, though fortune not unexpected. Brasol was likely to keep Nikola Senlis, the intendant there, pretty busy during his stay in Washington.

Byrne gave his name. Brasol himself came presently to the telephone. He was cordiality personified, in that heavy, intimate way that he thought effective toward men in high station.

"Well, well, Byrne, you'd hardly have thought it possible, when you left Groessbruck so abruptly, that we'd be seeing one another so soon, eh?"

"It was never impossible, at any rate," Byrne replied. "When may I see you?"

"Oh, but you're coming to dinner with me to-morrow night, I understand," Brasol returned, a little taken aback.

"I know that. But I shall want to talk with you before then. There are some things which I want settled, if possible, before we all meet under conditions when my tongue is tied."

"Oh! Well, I am tremendously busy but—could you come to me now? It's really the only time I shall be able to spare."

Byrne hesitated.

"Yes, I shall come now. At the legation?"

"If you don't mind."

"Not at all. I shall be with you in twenty minutes."

Byrne hurried back to the Buchanans' box. He arrived there just as the curtain went up on the second act.

"Infinitely sorry," he announced, "but I have been called away on unavoidable business for an hour or so. I shall be back for the third act."

His eyes swiftly swept the circle of the three occupants of the box to whom this announcement meant most. Buchanan, still completely in ignorance of all the back-stage business, looked merely questioning, a little surprised, but ready to accept. Laura, whose mind was engaged entirely with the matter of Byrne's clearing himself, was alarmed and anxious. Domenica flashed him one of those unforgettable glances of gratitude. For she could not fail to know what business it was that drew him away. He would probably have some information for all of them by the time he got back; so much he tried to tell them each one.

Brasol himself seemed to have set the stage for Byrne's reception. Byrne found himself shown at once into what he assumed was the private study of the minister, and was permitted to cool his heels there over two cigarettes before any one came to him. Then Brasol came bustling in as if he regretted above all things that he had made Byrne wait.

To Byrne's mind at first sight, Brasol showed signs of mental worry. There was no hint of weakness in his measured, almost premeditated step, nor in his square, thick-set body and ponderous shoulders. His leonine head, the baldness of which was tempered only by a silky down of white hairs, was as erect as ever, his fat eyes as inscrutable. The sole change that Byrne could see in the man was a deeper furrowing of

feature, and a certain indescribable loss of intensity or grimness, or perhaps of audacity.

Byrne spoke first, while they still gripped hands.

"You'll pardon my insisting upon seeing you to-night, before to-morrow night's dinner," he said. "It was most important to me."

"I can readily believe that," Brasol said in his deep, ringing voice.

"I am compelled to think," Byrne said, toying with a cigarette before he lighted it, "that your sudden arrival here has much to do with that unfortunate affair which brought me back to Washington."

Brasol's answer came without hesitation.

"You are quite right about that. After you had gone, I was amazed to hear that you intended to blame me for it. Very naturally I came here. I have no intention of permitting my status with Washington to be undermined by your defense of your amours."

From which speech Byrne found a new complexion cast upon the business in Groessbruck. To no one, not even to his trusted staff there, had he confided his suspicion that Brasol was in some way at the bottom of it—to no one, that is, except indirectly to the girl herself. Now suddenly he recalled that, as he tried to stanch her wound and to apply what he knew of first aid after she had shot herself, he asked her whether Brasol had not sent her there. Her denial had been so emphatic as to lead him to believe that he had struck upon the truth. But he had not questioned her further. For it was then no proper time to drive the affair, nor was she in any state to reply coherently to his questions. And before he could see her again, she was dead.

"Your being in Washington will scarcely influence my defense," Byrne said, by way of feeling the man out.

Brasol met his eyes.

"Perhaps not," he said.

"Which means—wait and see," Byrne conjectured.

"If you like," Brasol said. "You may give it your own interpretation."

Byrne writhed inwardly at the impasse, but permitted no sign of his disturbance to reach the surface.

"And I assume," he said urbanely, "that your invitation to dinner to-morrow night is a public flaunting of the fact that you and I are the best of friends."

"I don't like your tone of sarcasm. So far as I am concerned, we are the best of friends."

Byrne thought for a moment. This sort of interchange was getting him nowhere. He must change his tactics.

"And what if I refuse to come to your dinner?" he asked.

"No matter. The rest of them will come."

"I doubt that. They would not come if I gave them my reasons for staying away myself."

That seemed to stir Brasol to a momentary lapse from his poise.

"Meaning—Madame Fitzui, or what you chanced to have guessed about me in Styria?"

A look of triumph leaped into Byrne's eyes. The astute financier had been jockeyed into giving Byrne precisely the information he had come for—not as fully as he had hoped, to be sure, but enough.

"Both, or either one alone," he said, and did not conceal his note of triumph.

Brasol fenced with him for a moment, but could not conceal his disappointment. He realized now what he had done for himself.

"Shall you come to the dinner or not?" he asked.

"I would suggest," Byrne said, "that you let me know where I can get you by telephone to-morrow. Meantime I shall think it over."

"I have had a telephone installed in

the yacht. You can get me either there, or here at the legation, or at least leave word in either place."

Byrne turned to go away.

"Thanks. You shall hear further from me."

Byrne reached the door without any formality of leave-taking. Brasol turned thoughtfully to look after him, and just as Byrne put his hand on the door to open it, he spoke a single word:

"Byrne!"

Byrne looked back.

"Yes?"

"You have been very clever."

"Well?"

"Come back. Let us talk a moment more."

"I have but very little time——"

"What I have to say can be said in few words. You have pushed me to a somewhat premature disclosure of my plans. And yet, I don't know that it matters. I had hoped, perhaps, for a little fuller preparation. Yet from what I have already learned since I arrived in Washington, I feel that my preparation is sufficient."

"I suspect that you have made very good use of your time since you arrived."

"I have. You and I may as well understand one another now. I must beg you to make no use whatever of my name, in your defense to the state department. More than that, I propose to have the Marchesa di Castiglione, or Domenica Fitzui, add her plea to mine. I feel sure that you will scarcely be able to withstand the supplication of both of us."

Byrne's mask of imperturbability was dropped for a moment as he faced about.

"Then you know——"

Brasol bowed to him.

"You yourself suggested that I have made good use of my time since I arrived in Washington."

"Blackmail, eh? If I mention your name to the state department, you will

reveal, or betray—or whatever—Madame Fitzui."

"What I said was this: that Madame Fitzui will shortly add her plea to mine, that you do not use my name. If she finds it expedient to ask a favor of you, you can scarcely call it blackmail, can you?"

Byrne made no direct answer to what was purely an ironic question.

"And is that all you have to say to me?"

"All I have to say to you now."

"Then—au revoir, until to-morrow night at dinner."

In such an impasse did Byrne return to the theater. Three pairs of eyes shot questions at him as he entered the box during the second intermission, but his mask to each was impenetrable. He needed a long night's summing up, a delicate weighing of values, before he could answer the questions of any of them.

He was relieved that, on the way home from the theater, Domenica, claiming fatigue, desired to be dropped at her apartment. He feared that she would make some attempt to derive clandestine information from him, and for the life of him he knew not what he should tell her.

From Laura's curiosity he did not escape so easily. When they arrived at home, her father, doubtless thinking that he was doing them a favor, went to his study on the pretext of having work to do. And when they two were left alone in the library, she asked Byrne directly:

"Was it to see Brasol that you left the theater, Ross?"

"However did you guess it?" he parried lightly.

"It was not hard to guess. Intuition made it more certain. Do tell me whatever you can. Is it for your affair that he has come to Washington?"

"Yes! We are in open conflict."

"But what can he do?"

"That remains to be seen."

"You learned nothing, then, from him?"

"Nothing of any real advantage to me. One does not easily learn things which Brasol does not wish to be known."

"Ross, why do you not take father into your confidence?"

Domenica's involvement in the affair was, of course, the chief reason, but Byrne could scarcely give that fact as a motive.

"I may, in time," he said. "Not yet, though. He would be very likely to stay away altogether from Brasol's dinner, and it is highly advisable that we go to it."

"Yes, I want above all things to meet the man Brasol. I feel sure that I might hit upon something that will be of advantage to you."

"Laura, please keep yourself apart from it all. Brasol is not the sort of man for you to become involved with."

"As if I could keep out of it! Ross, don't you realize that it is exactly as important to me that you be cleared of this outrageous innuendo, as it is to you? And that, for that very reason, it is exactly as necessary for me to work toward it, as for you? You do me a tremendous wrong by keeping me in the dark about any of it."

Byrne bit his lips.

"Laura, you had really better keep out of it," was all he could say.

"As if I could keep out of it!" she retorted. "And if we don't work together on it, we shall work separately. That must be something of an ultimatum."

CHAPTER IV.

After Byrne had left him, Brasol realized that, to some extent, haste and ruthlessness were now the better part of wisdom. The staff of the legation, virtually at his command, had no difficulty in establishing Domenica's where-

abouts that evening. As soon, therefore, as Brasol was reasonably sure of finding her in her apartment, he telephoned to her there.

"Please reserve all expressions of surprise or of malevolence," he told her in his own language. "We understand one another too well. It is highly important for me to see you immediately. . . . No, no, I quite comprehend that you would not want me to come there. I am as eager as you to bury the past. But, for your own sake, you must see me to-night, and at once, for a very few minutes. . . . Yes, yes, anywhere you like. I can pick you up in a car and we can talk as we drive. . . . You should know me too well to dare refuse me. . . . Ah, yes, that is better. . . . Yes, the chauffeur will know. . . . Just repeat that address."

He copied down with care the rendezvous which she gave him—a spot somewhat to the east of the Union Station, where there was no possibility of being seen by her acquaintances, and went there at once in one of the legation cars. He found her—a cloaked and veiled figure, standing on the designated corner—and got out of the car to help her in. He repeated to the chauffeur her directions for their midnight drive, and got in beside her.

"I think we had best cover six years in a sentence or two," he began. "I have never been in ignorance of your life since you left Styria. No woman like you can go out of a man's life without taking a vast amount of him with her. I have kept in touch with you. I know the circumstances of your meeting Buchanan at Nice, and of your coming here to marry him when his wife died. But, of course, I have made no attempt to win you back to me. A futile attempt it would have been, and I have no time to waste in futility. And gradually I found assuagement in my work, and in the new power that came to me as a result of the war, and of my

ability to turn things my way. Little by little the love of power, and the rewards of success, have smothered the love of you, so that I can think of you, and talk with you, with the completest equanimity. That I was able to do it, was at first an amazing discovery to me. I wondered, all the way down here to-night, exactly what my reactions to you would be, and find that they are nil."

"They would be nil," Domenica said.

"But, even if they had not been, I would have said to you exactly what I intended to say."

"I am listening."

"Tell me, did you send Byrne to me this evening?"

"Did he say that I did?"

"No. I guessed it. I have a way of feeling things."

"You flatter yourself."

"That is neither here nor there."

"Has Byrne reported to you the result of his mission to me?"

"No."

"I thought not. He would have had no chance. I saw to that."

"Why have you asked me to dinner?"

"To put you into a proper frame of mind for doing what I want you to do for me."

"By tormenting me, by baiting me in front of Basil and his daughter——"

"I think so—yes," Brasol said with satisfaction.

"What is it you want me to do?"

"Do you know anything about Byrne's affair in Styria? About the girl who killed herself?"

"Nothing but what the world knows. Oh, so that is it! You were involved in that."

"Byrne thinks I was, at any rate. And his defense to the state department will be just that."

"I understand what is coming."

"Yes, I thought you must. In fact, I told him to-night that you would add your plea to mine, to refrain from men-

tioning my name to the state department."

"Blackmail?"

"So he seemed to think. We needn't split hairs about it."

"And what did he say?"

"He gave me no answer. I didn't expect that he would. I told him my plan, only so that he would not tell more of the affair to Buchanan, so that it would make the business simpler for you. He is not likely to tell Buchanan now, so that you are safe enough—if you can make enough of a plea."

"He gave you no answer?" she replied thoughtfully.

"None."

"Then I shall give you my answer. I shall have nothing to do with it all. Let Byrne clear himself. I should like above all things to see him clear himself."

"I think you may change your mind when you know more about it. To me it means ruin, if it is proved that I instigated that affair. You must know that. My whole fortune and power are in the balance. Above all things I must have Washington in my favor. I am committed in a thousand ways. You can guess that only the utmost despair would have brought me on a record-breaking chase to Washington, when I have the most pressing affairs at home."

"Has Byrne proof of it?"

"No, but he will have."

"How do you mean?"

"The girl, whom I sent to force him into a betrayal of American policy, did not die. I got her safely out of hospital, and passed the word that she did die, so that Byrne might not try to find her. But then, when she was recovered, and after Byrne had been recalled, she got angry with me for no apparent reason, and wrote him a letter, leaving it at the American legation there, making a full confession of all she knew about me and my affairs. She told me after it was too late to stop it. The

letter was sent on to him personally, in the legation pouch. I have not been able to intercept it. Before that was let loose, the chances were about even that the state department would not take his unsupported word against me, and that he could not clear himself. But this letter—that will surely clear him, and as surely ruin me. And it is to keep him from using that letter that I have come to you. You can imagine that I am desperate indeed."

"Yes," she answered absently. And then, after a pause: "Has Byrne got the letter yet?"

"I think not. I have tried to compute the time necessary for the legation pouch to reach Washington. It has a routine through dispatch agents, you know, which delays it. I do not think that he will have the letter before Monday. So that you will have plenty of time."

"Time! Time, you say? As if all the time between creation and eternity were enough to accomplish the impossible. Don't you realize that you are demanding impossibilities of me?"

"Nothing is impossible for a woman like you. And Byrne is no more than a man."

"Don't you realize that you are putting yourself completely into my power by all these confessions?"

"Again I think not. I have weighed chances pretty delicately. I know I am right. I have not yet reminded you, of course, of the price of your failure."

"You mean that, if I fail to accomplish this which you ask, you will tell Basil Buchanan what you know about me?"

"Tell him, and the newspapers of the world, so that there will be no corner of the world where you can hide yourself unknown. The newspapers will find it a delicious morsel, of far too much interest as news to be killed at the request of any one."

She was silent for a long moment.

"Have you anything more to say to me?"

"Nothing more, except"—his voice seemed to soften here, to take on a more personal note if that were possible—"except that I very much regret being forced to take this step. If I could have had my way, I would have left you to live out the life of peace and love which I think you had at last found for yourself. But as it is—and, after all, a woman must pay. None has ever yet escaped."

"But if circumstances had not been as they are," she asked softly, "you would not have made me pay, would you?"

"Please don't begin in that fashion. It will do you no good. I have put you out of my life, and you can never enter it again—not even for a moment. It will do you no good to try to escape your dilemma by making me love you again. I can't ever forget now that I am Federigo Brasol, and that no woman——"

"No, I suspect you are right. Will you take me back to the station? I shall find a taxi there."

"As you will."

He gave the order through the speaking tube. Then he turned to her, all harshness gone from his voice again.

"You are coming to dinner to-morrow night, are you not?"

"Oh, yes. I could never have refused you that. You know it."

"It should be an amusing dinner what with you, and Byrne——"

"It should be at least that."

He looked round at her, aroused by some peculiar quality in her voice. But his scrutiny of her was baffled by the thickness of the veil she still wore.

"Giulia, you talk queerly."

"And why should I not talk queerly? You would scarcely expect me to be gay, and prattlesome, after such an ultimatum?"

"No, but I mean, you talk as if you

were in the shadow of some dire portent."

"I don't mean to. I am merely thinking how queer a dinner it will be to-morrow night."

Brasol was still a little worried, though he could not have told why.

"But you do understand, do you not, that there is no revocation, no repeal of any of this I have said to you?"

"Do I not know it? Are you not Federigo Brasol?"

They exchanged no more words until Brasol let her out by the station.

CHAPTER V.

At twelve next morning Byrne went to Domenica. The anticipation of his visit to her was by no means pleasant. Neither a night's vigil nor a morning's review thereof had revealed to him any determinate escape from the impasse. How much to tell Domenica he did not know. To quote to her point-blank the ultimatum which Brasol had delivered to him seemed impossible. "I've got to clear myself, and you must take the consequences, although I realize that to clear myself means to ruin the life you have made for yourself here." It amounted to that, or very nearly that. If ever he needed diplomacy, it was now.

His first sight of Domenica was not reassuring. At their greeting now, he was led to compare her with the Domenica of the morning before, when she came to him in the Buchanans' sun parlor. Then she had been an exquisite woman, very sure of herself; now she was more a frightened child, shrinking from a bludgeon. She looked lovely enough at first glance, what with her coppery hair and her long lashes ready to veil the blueness of her eyes, what with the soft, cool, indescribable green of her morning gown. But all that was only first impression. Ten seconds of being with her convinced Byrne that her

identity with yesterday's Domenica was in these externals only. And he could guess that she had had as long a vigil over the disturbed affair as he himself had had.

She greeted him low-voiced, and led him into her sitting room, a place of charm that was unique, yet rather austere for a woman's sole occupancy, a room the atmosphere of which seemed more fostering of unusual devotions than of social dalliance. A floor lamp of wrought iron beside a severe chaise longue that was covered with cloth of gold, and near it a reading table with books in variegated bindings—these were the only notes in the room not precisely of some medieval period, and even these departures were not inharmonious. For the rest, Byrne could imagine that the window hangings had been altar cloths, for the extraordinary quality of the light that filtered through them.

"It has been a long morning, my friend," she said to him.

"You said that I should come at twelve. I might have come earlier, but it wasn't expedient to telephone you about a change in appointment."

"No. Even that fact is a reminder that I am—am what? What am I? Pariah? Worse? Can you believe it?"

"I think, madame, that you are inclined to magnify——"

"Perhaps. Sit down. Will you smoke? Tell me, did you see Brasol last night?"

"Yes. I saw him."

Domenica had long since resolved to put Byrne to a test, to see the manner of man he was. And now, though he did not realize it, she was watching him with all the alertness of her wits.

"Tell me about it," she bade him.

"What should I tell you, except that I believe you have nothing to fear for yourself."

"Really? Are you sure?"

"Fairly sure. I couldn't ask him

point-blank about you. You warned me not to."

Byrne saw no signs on her face of the relief he expected to find there.

"Yes, I warned you. But, if he is not here to torment me, why is he here?"

"Brasol has many affairs, a multitude of irons in the fire. And, if you know him at all, you will recall that he is not a man to publish the details of those affairs."

"True enough. Yet you are keeping something back. If you were not trying to assuage me with a false security, you would be far more convincing in your speech; you would speak to me with far more conviction."

Byrne shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry. I can only talk as I talk. You may be assured that he means no trouble for you at dinner to-night, at any rate."

"That is something of a relief. But are you quite sure that he gave you no indication of evil designs against me?" she insisted.

Byrne met her eyes squarely, and lied magnanimously.

"Quite sure, madame."

"You are more than good," she murmured thoughtfully. "I've been thinking, this morning, that his sudden appearance may have something to do with your own affair in Styria. I've not asked you about it, of course; and you need tell me nothing more than you choose to tell me. As you may have guessed, I know rather a lot about Styrian affairs. Perhaps I can help you as you have helped me."

Byrne answered unhesitatingly.

"You are kind, but I doubt if you can help me."

"Do you feel certain that you can clear yourself?"

"No. Rather uncertain of it, as a matter of fact."

"I suspect I shall know how it comes out."

"All Washington will know that, never fear."

"A *cause célèbre*—public-trial sort of thing?"

"Oh, no! For certain reasons I shall have to ask the department to keep it all confidential."

"And will the department of state do that?"

"I think so. I can only try to procure it. Yes, I think I can persuade the department."

"And you don't care to take me more into your confidence?"

"No."

"Do you not think that I am your friend?"

"Friendship, or the lack of it, does not enter into this affair."

"But it must enter into it, if only I could convince you that I might help you. You say yourself that you are not sure of clearing yourself of these grave innuendoes which are likely to ruin your career. Should you not try out every possibility of clearing yourself? And is not one of those possibilities the fact that my knowledge of Styria, and of Federigo Brasol, may help you?"

"Let us not discuss the matter further."

She scanned him for a moment.

"I must believe that you still lack faith in me."

"It's not that, of all things," Byrne assured her.

"Come. Let me show you something. And be flattered that I show it to you, for you alone of all the world shall know it. Come!"

Byrne, somehow abashed spiritually by the emotion that seemed to stir her now, followed her. She led him into her bedroom. This room was in polar contrast with the austerity of the outer room, what with its soft, old brocades, its Regency furnishings that might have been the work of Cressent himself, its Lydian atmosphere of the whole, and,

perhaps above all, her own robe flung across a couch at the foot of her bed. But she gave him no more than a second to see these things.

She went at once to an unusual chest in marquetry that stood breast high to her in a darkened corner. By the deft manipulation of some secret spring, she lowered the front of it. As the side fell out toward her, the interior was automatically lighted by ingeniously colored bulbs that gave a phosphorescent glow to the interior. It held nothing but a bit of statuary in bronze, which stood out in high, startling relief under the light and against a background of ox-blood velvet.

Now she stood back a little from it, brooding upon it.

"Look," she exclaimed with dramatic appeal. "Jael and Sisera. Do you remember? While he rested in her tent, she drove a nail into his head."

"Yes, I remember. Excellent bit of—but, good heavens!" Byrne swung round to face her.

She met his eyes with a scornful smile.

"Do you recognize the models?"

"Brasol—and you."

"Brasol—as he is at heart. Yes, and I for what I am. The sculptor did not badly, do you think?"

Brasol indeed it was, but transformed into a hideous conception of something not human—yet always Brasol. And Domenica herself, unmistakable of identity, quite as lovely as she really was, yet somehow one of the proscribed. An incomparable artist it must have been who had done it.

While Byrne stared at it, gasping mentally, Domenica went on:

"They call me pagan, and I am. An idolator, and that image is what I worship. For years I have worshiped at this shrine, and this alone. Never a night but I have sat before it, sometimes for a moment, sometimes for an hour, until I have dared reach out and

touch the nail in his head, until I have became in very fact a Jael."

Byrne finally turned his back upon it in sheer horror. Domenica lifted up the side of the coffer, and shut its contents from view.

"Now do you trust me?" she asked.

"Now have you faith in me?"

"Madame, it was never a question of having faith in you. I have faith in you."

"Then come to me with your difficulties and let me help you. Tell me everything. I know that I can help you, what with my intimate knowledge of Brasol's life, and of Styrian affairs. Help me to drive the nail into Brasol's head. I cannot alone nerve myself to do it. Tell me everything."

Byrne's lips twitched.

"Far better for you that I tell you nothing. Knowledge would be dangerous to you. Brasol is unprincipled—you know that. You have found peace and love now. Take it and cling to it, and make it throw out of your life that hideous conception hidden there."

"As if I could throw it out! I can have no peace until I am in fact a Jael. If only physical killing were not so simple! You can help me to peace, and you alone. Tell me what you know. Let me help you."

"For your own sake, madame, I shall tell you nothing."

"I can protect myself. I am not afraid. You need my help. Tell me, do you not know that I can help you? Tell me that at least. What I know of Brasol—would it not help to clear you? Tell me that at least."

"Yes, I suspect you could help me."

Byrne studied her a moment. Then he said:

"Perhaps I shall. I don't know. You have me terrifically confused."

At that she seemed to find great relief. Almost visibly she drew in upon herself, as one who has gained triumph after vast exertion.

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"It is right for you to be confused. It means the dawning of truth upon you. From your confusion will come clarity. Then you will ask my help, I know. We shall see one another at dinner."

After he had gone, she went to the telephone and found Brasol at the Styrian legation.

"I have seen Byrne," she told him, "and have laid a good train."

"Excellent," Brasol replied. "I thought you would see your line of best interests."

Her answer was cold.

"I wanted to tell you, so that you would exercise every precaution to-night at dinner. Mr. Buchanan himself is blind, but his daughter is argus-eyed. And a slip by you would destroy everything."

"Thanks for the suggestion," was the reply. "I shall bear it in mind."

CHAPTER VI.

In Federigo Brasol there must have been something of the strain of those imperial Cæsars such as Nero and Caligula, whose refinements in their own particular interests have been unexcelled in history. He had first conceived the plan of this strange dinner only as a means of weakening Domenica by the Damocles sword over her head, of reducing her to his will by the subtle torment of it.

But now that he had found it more expedient to declare himself earlier to Byrne and to Domenica, he found even a more delicious pleasure in the anticipation of the dinner—himself sitting at the head of the table, watching the interplay of his guests each with his own fear, each hanging on his every word lest he overspeak and thereby engender suspicion, baiting both Byrne and Domenica by very hairbreadth restraint in his speeches.

Yet in them both he found a match

for himself. Byrne, however smiling and urbane, was in a state of almost exalted audacity toward him, Brasol felt; a sort of camaraderie that none the less gave the older man an uneasy feeling that Byrne would, at the slightest provocation, throttle him with his bare hands out of pure delight at the exercise.

Domenica, to his mind, was far lovelier than he had ever seen her. Turquoises, a gown of such a blue as few women of her coloring would have dared to wear but which glorified her, a buoyancy such as he had never seen in her, made her for the moment once more excessively desirable in his eyes. But she meet him with that quick glance of hate which in the old days he had delighted to evoke from her, and it frightened him a little now. There was no telling about such a woman as Domenica. Thank Heaven, Byrne was also his victim! You could depend on men.

And it looked very much to him, as the dinner progressed, as if Byrne were her victim as well. Purposely he had seated the two of them together, rather well apart from Buchanan and Laura, who were saddled with the legation staff, except that Laura was at his own left hand.

From his vantage point he watched things closely. Domenica was all but openly making love to Byrne, and Byrne seemed alarmingly responsive to her advances. Well, that was as it should be. She was playing him. She must land him finally. What man could withstand such a woman as Domenica? Had he not himself had experience, to his cost? He wondered if any way occurred to him of helping things along. Better leave it alone.

Buchanan seemed to be giving all his attention to the dowager of the embassy, on whose right he sat. But that was superficial only. Brasol saw that Buchanan was much interested in Byrne and Domenica. Laura, beside him, was

watching the affair as well, and looking often at her father.

With things progressing in this fashion, he began to cultivate Laura, and found her exceptionally fertile for his advances. She was willing enough to talk with him, but seemed to prefer to talk with him in quiet dialogue apart from any general conversation.

"Tell me about Styria," she asked him once.

He looked round the table, and lowered his voice.

"If you don't mind, perhaps we'd best not talk of it. It might be embarrassing to Byrne."

"But I want to know about it. He has told me nothing even about his own affair there—nothing, at least, that seems true."

Brasol's eyes narrowed at her.

"If I were in his place, I doubt if I should tell much—to you."

She looked at him with eyes that told of her wound, though her voice belied it.

"Will you tell me at least your version of it?"

"Some time, perhaps."

"To-night?"

Brasol thought a moment.

"Yes, if we can find an opportunity,"

Laura said confidently.

"I shall make one for you. I want to know as much as I can about it. It is of vital importance to me, as you can guess."

"I think we had best not discuss it more," Brasol said. "If there is an opportunity later, I shall talk with you all you care to about it. But not here. People are looking; they may be listening."

Brasol's speech now became more abstracted. He was busy weighing relationships with his delicate precision of values. As the women left the room, he found occasion to whisper to Domenica:

"You appear to be doing well with Byrne."

"You must be patient. It is not easy."

"You must hurry. The time is short," he warned her.

And that fact did indeed worry Brasol. He smoked with the men in a mood of aloofness, until a servant brought him a note from Laura Buchanan:

Is there not some private study here where we may talk for a moment before we go? I am waiting for your answer.

Brasol was not unwilling. He excused himself from the man and followed the servant. Laura was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, ostensibly studying an unusual suit of old Turkish armor in the hall. Brasol bowed to her.

"This is flattery indeed," he said.

"I told you I must make an opportunity of speaking with you of Styria and of Mr. Byrne's affair before we left to-night."

"The minister's private offices are at the back here. If you will permit me to show you the way——"

Laura followed him. Inside the fusty, overfurnished study, he looked to her a question whether he should shut the door. She nodded in the affirmative. He gave her a cigarette and lighted it for her, waiting all the time for her to speak. His own mind was very busy.

"Will you tell me frankly," she began, "whether you know of any way to help clear Mr. Byrne of this infamous charge against him?"

Brasol, inwardly, was much pleased at that opening. It appeared to him that Laura was but little versed in the fine arts of diplomacy as he knew it, or she would not have made that direct opening.

"To that I can only say that, to my mind, there are no such facts. I think the newspapers already have every pertinent detail."

"Will you tell me, then, why you have

followed him here so soon, so unexpectedly?"

"You put that in rather odd fashion," he replied urbanely. "But, if you insist upon knowing, I will tell you that, in part, it is for pleasure, in part for business—yes, and in part to try to keep Byrne from using my name in his defense. You know, of course, that he has been trying to accuse me."

"How do you mean—keep him from using your name in his defense?"

"Why shouldn't I try to keep him from it? I am very sure that I don't care to have my name used to cover his—his escapades."

"How do you intend to keep him from using it?"

"A mere plea, as man to man."

She thought that over for a moment.

"Tell me, did the girl die?"

"I know nothing about her."

"Then it is fairly clear that I can get no help from you."

"I regret it very much. You can't blame me for wanting my name kept untarnished."

"Certainly not. When am I going to see your yacht? You will ask me out to it one of these times, will you not?"

Brasol caught himself up.

"Why do you want to see my yacht?" he asked abruptly, his urbanity gone for the moment.

"Oh, you don't want me to?" she asked him quickly.

He recovered himself.

"Of course I do. It was only that the unexpectedness of your request caught me for a moment off my guard. When will you come?"

"Do you mind setting a time? Tomorrow morning, perhaps? Rather early."

"You are coming alone?"

"I think so. Yes, I should come alone."

"May I send the legation car for you at—say—ten o'clock? Is that too early?"

"Please. That will do very nicely."

"Is there anything else you want to ask me about?"

"Nothing. Thanks for all you have told me, and for the invitation."

Brasol lingered for a moment after Laura had left him. He was much baffled by her request to see the yacht. An unusual, unthinkable request, and out of a blue sky. Was she one of those women possessed of uncanny intuitions, whom alone of all things he feared? Or was she in reality merely curious, merely adventurous? Which ever the case, he could not refuse to let her come. What it portended he could not guess; and he took refuge in postponing thought of it until the morrow.

Laura returned to the drawing-room in high spirits. She was impatient now to get away, and but ill endured the formality leading up to their departure. On their way home, Buchanan begged Domenica to stay with them for a quiet evening at bridge. Domenica assented.

As they entered the house, the butler spoke to Byrne.

"A letter for you, sir. A state department messenger brought it."

"A special messenger!" Byrne exclaimed. "What on earth— It must be my appointment for the hearing."

The butler was back instantly, and gave Byrne the letter.

"No, it's from Styria," Byrne exclaimed. "How odd! It must have come in the dispatch bag, and old Merrill shot it out to me at once, no doubt thinking that it might be important."

"Is it important?" Laura asked.

Byrne slit it open, and scanned the first page of it.

"No, not important," he said, cramming it into his pocket.

Laura found Domenica watching Ross rather intently. Domenica followed her in silence to Laura's room, where they put off their cloaks.

"And what," Domenica asked her

there, "do you think of the great Brasol?"

"Quite the man you would expect him to be," Laura replied.

"From which I gather that you don't much like him."

"Do you like him?" Laura countered.

"Not much, I must confess. He seemed to have been rather taken with you."

Laura laughed.

"I led him on a little, I suspect."

"Oh, yes! To any particular end?"

"Yes. I fancied he might know something of Ross Byrne's affair, and tried to get out of him what he knows."

"Ah!" Domenica said with excellent nonchalance. "And did you succeed?"

"I'm not altogether sure yet. But I think I have something."

Domenica looked at her sharply, but veiled her scrutiny when she found Laura returning it.

"Do let me know, dear, if you learn anything. I am as much interested as you, though I've not said anything to you about it. I have always thought that you preferred to have nothing said about it."

"Domenica, you are precious! Of course I shall let you know," Laura said cordially.

The two men were waiting for them when they came down—her father always boyishly elated, Byrne rather grim and moody. They played until late, with no conversation except of the cards. was glad when the game was over, and her father started away with Domenica. Then she spoke directly to Ross.

"I've scarcely been able to wait for them to go, Ross," she said. "I've so much to talk with you about."

"What things, Laura?"

"I talked long and earnestly with our friend Brasol to-night."

"So I noticed," Byrne said.

"And I believe that by to-morrow I shall have something of real value to you from him."

Byrne, fearing much now, probably looked his alarm, and turned away from her, on the pretext of finding a cigarette, lest she read him too openly.

"What may all that be?" he asked, while his back was still turned toward her.

"You don't seem to be in any torment of enthusiasm about it," she said, her mood graver, a little hurt. "I really thought I might be of help to you."

Byrne turned quickly.

"Infinitely sorry, Laura," he said with self-reproach in word and bearing. "I'm eager to hear what you may have to say."

"Really, Ross?"

"Really!"

"Of course, I've been thinking rather a lot about it all, especially since Brasol came here, following you to Washington."

"Yes," he prompted her.

"And so far as I can analyze it, only the girl whom you called Brasol's friend could really clear you."

"Yes?"

"And if she is in fact dead, then she can't help. But if she is alive, Brasol undoubtedly knows it. And he would want to keep her sequestered, so that you could not get at her. If he wants to keep her sequestered, and she is his favorite, where should she be but on his yacht?"

"Laura! I wonder——"

She laughed merrily with self-satisfaction.

"Yes, and I wondered. And so I asked Brasol to-night if I could come out and see his yacht to-morrow."

"You didn't!"

"Yes. And he, instead of welcoming me with open arms and a brass band, was very much upset at my request."

"Oh!" Byrne seemed to know relief at that.

"But, of course, he could not find any decent pretext for refusing me, and so he accepted my invitation to come

out and see him. And I am going to-morrow at ten."

"Laura, you aren't going!"

"And why shouldn't I go?"

Byrne bit his lip. Here was indeed a mess for Domenica, if Laura insisted, and if Laura's mission proved at all successful; as, indeed, Byrne thought it was likely to.

"But even if you go, and even if this girl is on the yacht, he will take good care that you do not see her."

"I've anticipated all that. I've ways of seeing everything on the yacht that I want to see." She was very emphatic about that.

Again Byrne turned his back on her, this time only to look at the fire in the grate.

"How?" he asked her.

"You, perhaps, might not completely approve, and for that reason perhaps I should not tell you," she replied, in good-humored teasing.

"I should probably approve of anything you cared to do—except going to Brasol's yacht. That you must not do, Laura."

"Ross," she said, sobering instantly at the velvet command in his voice, "I don't understand. Why shouldn't I go to Brasol's yacht?"

"For one reason, because I don't like Brasol."

"Would you go with me?"

"I'd far prefer not to."

"I could take Domenica with me."

"Why take her?"

"Why, Ross, how strange you are! Take her as chaperon, of course."

Byrne turned to face her now, in some respects a different man altogether from the one who had last spoken.

"Laura, I wish you would keep out of all this business. It's—it's muck—it's all muck. You'll regret it if you don't keep out of it."

She regarded him closely.

"But why?"

"I can't tell you why."

"Surely, you must tell me, of all people."

"I can't do that."

"You are queer! I've felt all the time, somehow, that you did not much want to clear yourself—or try to."

"Things have happened so that I can't."

"Are you letting Brasol intimidate you?"

"Perhaps, in a manner of speaking."

"That amazes me."

"It's one of those queer, intricate knots that fate throws about a man. Why fate should choose one man more than another, I don't know, but there you are!"

"But don't you realize that you've more than yourself to consider in this?"

"I realize it only too well."

"More than your career——"

"More than my career, of course. But there are many useful things a man may do in the world, besides diplomacy."

"You've a cloud on yourself, in the public mind."

"I know that."

"And that cloud will besmirch me as well."

"I know it only too well, Laura; that is, if you care to stick by me. Perhaps you don't."

"I don't know what to think. You were so eager to clear yourself when you came home."

"And still am, if it is possible. I am talking only of impossibilities."

"And asking me to keep out of it altogether."

"Yes."

"You don't want me—me—to know the facts."

"Not all the facts—no."

"The young lady in question," Laura went on, talking as if to herself, "is on Brasol's yacht, I may assume, and you are very much afraid to have me meet her, to find her."

"I don't want you to take any part in it."

"And yet, before Brasol came to Washington, before the girl came here, we may assume, you were going to try to clear yourself. In other words, the girl's coming here suddenly closes your mouth."

"Laura, what are you getting at?" he asked sharply. "I don't like—or at any rate don't understand—your tone."

"I should say," she returned coldly, "that the facts speak for themselves."

"What? You mean that you think there was an affair between me and the girl?"

"I don't know what else I am permitted to think."

"You can't take me on trust in that respect?"

"It seems to be asking rather a lot. You know that anything you have to say to me is completely confidential. I haven't even told father anything about all this. You know you are safe in telling me anything. Yet you will tell me nothing. Which fact would seem to prove that your secret is one that affects you and me personally—not at all any question of state. The girl—the facts as they are presented—what else am I permitted to believe?"

Byrne stared at her in unbelief.

"Laura, you mean—that you believe that—I and that girl—— You can't believe that."

"There's nothing else to believe."

"You can't take me on faith?"

"Could you expect me to?"

"Well, upon my word! I—I—at least I've got proof of that—proof that you are wrong."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. But if I show it to you—I can't use it, unfortunately. And you would expect me to make use of it."

"Perhaps not, after all. I'm awfully upset. I scarcely know now what I would do."

"But I can't have you believing that of me—not for a moment. Wait! I'll get you the letter."

Byrne waited a moment for her negation. She stood silent, merely looking at him. He could no longer avoid a climax. He went to his room, where he had left the letter he had received that night as they returned from the legation.

The letter was not in the drawer of the writing desk, where he had left it. No need to look further for it, however. On the blotter of the desk lay a note addressed to him. He opened it and read hurriedly:

I needed the letter you got to-night, and have taken it. I am still relying on you. Come to me to-morrow at ten and I will explain.

After a second reading of the note, to make sure that it was real, he recalled that Domenica had excused herself on one of the occasions when she was dummy at bridge, and had gone upstairs for a longish time. Then, and not till then, did he look again a second time, and again in vain. It was all so incredible to him.

He thrust Domenica's note into his waistcoat pocket and went back down to Laura.

"I am very sorry," he told her, "but I shall have to ask you, after all, to take even this on faith."

"You mean," Laura cried as if she had been wounded, "that you have decided, after all, that you will not show me the letter?"

"I mean neither more nor less than what I said—that you will have to take me on faith."

"That—seems impossible—now."

"There appears to be no more to be said." Byrne spoke after a time.

"No, I think not. Good night."

CHAPTER VII.

Before Domenica had finished her breakfast tray the next morning, there came for her a telephone call from Laura. Impossible to conjecture what

it was she wanted. What with Byrne's coming to see her at ten o'clock, there might be complications. If only Domenica had permitted her maid to answer it, she might have been tempted to deny herself to Laura. As it was, she had to face it; and she faced it with her heart in her mouth until Laura's first words gave her some reassurance.

"Domenica, dear, are you really awake?" Laura asked. "And may I come to you at once?"

Much relieved by the absence of any hostility in Laura's introduction, Domenica answered:

"Yes, of course, to both your questions."

"Thanks so much. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Domenica looked at her watch. It was but a little after nine. If Laura's unusual business were of short duration, she would certainly be gone by the time Byrne arrived. Rather a piling up of things, all told. But Domenica was already very nearly dressed. She hurried her maid through it, and decided to receive Laura in the austere outer room rather than in the intimacy of her own room. Ordinarily she had never been afraid of Laura's making inquiry about the contents of that chest that contained her idol of hate. Ordinarily she could have so easily evaded any questions. But this morning, tense as she was about the whole situation, she felt an instinctive aversion to having Laura lay eyes upon it.

Hence, when Laura arrived, she found Domenica, fully dressed in a loose morning gown, lazily reading *L'Illustration* while she smoked a cigarette on that stiff if exquisitely designed chaise longue. No one could have guessed, from her lovely indolence, that her every faculty was alive and vibrant when Laura entered.

"I've really come to ask you to do me a tremendous favor, Domenica," Laura said, dropping rather breathlessly

into one of the heavy chairs by the window. "You really are the only person who can do it for me."

"I should like to think, Laura, that you had chosen me to do it for you out of all your friends."

"Well, perhaps I have. At any rate, you are the first and only one who has occurred to me. I want to go out on Brasol's yacht this morning. I am rather frightened to do it alone. I want you to come with me."

"Extraordinary desire!"

"Not so queer as you think. You know, of course, all about Ross' business. I much appreciate your not having said anything to me about it, but I know you know it. Listen. I want to tell you——"

Still breathlessly, she told Domenica, without interruption, essentially all that she had told Byrne the night before concerning her theory, and Brasol's invitation; and concluded with:

"And Ross won't hear of my going out there. And so I have asked you to——"

"No, I should think he would not listen to it," Domenica broke in. "You mustn't go out there."

"But I must, and shall. I could never sleep again if I did not. We have quarreled terribly about it. Virtually we are no longer engaged. He asks me to take on trust what no woman could take on trust. I must settle the——"

Domenica broke in again.

"What is that you say, Laura? That you have quarreled—you and Ross?"

"Terribly, last night. He asks me to believe what no woman could believe."

"Laura, I would believe anything under the heavens that Rossiter Byrne told me."

"Not if you loved him as I do, and were torn by jealousy. You can't understand. The torture is hideous! I must know for myself——"

"You are very, very wrong. A

woman like you must love with her head as well as with her heart."

"The sleepless night I have had——"

"I tell you, I repeat it, that you are wrong."

"Then why doesn't he tell me? Why doesn't he try to explain it all?"

"I am sure he has the best of reasons."

"I believe you are in league with him against me, to cover up something. What? I don't know. I can't think of but one thing. Domenica, you must help me. You must go out to the yacht with me."

"But if we went, and the girl was there, Brasol would take good care not to let you see her, if he chose not to let you see her."

"I have that all arranged. Prohibition agents, you know—search warrant. The yacht is in American waters. Come with me, Domenica."

"Please don't ask me again. I should not do so."

Laura stared at her for a moment.

"You and Ross are better friends than any one knows," she said suddenly.

"What mad notion—or what do you mean by that?" Domenica asked in amazement that was not feigned.

"I recall now. He recognized you—wouldn't tell me how or where. Yes, there was some talk of a portrait—but why didn't he say something about it when we were all together? Why did he keep silent then? I know, I know there is something——"

"What meaning has all that?"

"That in some fashion you are trying to protect him against my knowing what I must know. What I must know if ever I have another moment of peace!"

"You are hysterical, Laura. You have lost all sense of reason."

"Will you go out to the yacht with me?"

"No, I shall not. But only because I would not want it known that either you or I had visited Brasol's yacht."

"Then I shall go alone."

"And I should be compelled to take some means of stopping it," Domenica said.

"Who or what could stop me if I choose to go?" Laura said, rising suddenly.

"Laura, let me tell you something," Domenica said, with a desperate earnestness. "If Brasol has invited you out to the yacht at all, it is more than likely that he is setting a trap for you of some sort. You must stay away from it altogether."

"That is precisely what I knew you would say. How can he trap me, or why should he?"

Domenica regarded her intently, and with a vast, mothering pity. It was clear enough that Laura's speech had not exaggerated her mental condition. The ravages of a sleepless night were too evident. No persuasion could keep her now from putting some end to her doubts; nothing short of physical interference could keep her away from the yacht, unless——

"Laura, I think I must—save you from yourself," she said.

"What is this? Some more duplicity?"

"No; I want to tell you why Ross Byrne was unwilling to defend himself as he should. I would have told you before, but that I have always been in some respects rather afraid of you. There must be in you much of your mother, something of that cold impersonality, that makes one hesitate to confide in you. I have always felt it, and hoped that ultimately I might grow into your heart, so that I might. Perhaps I have been weak, but I have been afraid. I knew, when I came here, that there was between you and me a wall that I had to scale, because you would not scale it. Am I not right?"

Laura looked at her blankly.

"Perhaps. I suspect so. What has all this, though, to do with——"

"I am coming to that. I perceive that I am forced to come to it. Otherwise I would not yet take a chance. But the fact is— Oh, it is a long story, full of conflicting motives. Nothing, after all, is ever motivated simply. My father was an Italian officer—yes, of noble family, of which he and I alone were left. He was taken prisoner early in the war in the operations along the Tyrol. I followed him through the lines, to try to find him. I couldn't, of course. But there seemed nothing else to do. I was only seventeen at the time. I fell into Brasol's hands. He was an Austrian officer. He installed me in Budapest. I never found my father. I hated Brasol, and yet—"

"Domenica!"

"Yes, I knew you would detest me for it. Instinctively. I make no excuses. I tell it to you exactly as it happened. I tell you I detested Brasol, but you can't guess what Hungary was during the war. I was interned there throughout it. I had no way of escape. He offered to marry me after the war, but I couldn't endure him. I got away as soon as I could, when peace was made. Then I managed to retrieve part of our resources, which were unfortunately mostly in Austrian investments. But it sufficed, and I went to Paris to live. I met your father there. I have no excuses to make. I probably never should have told you; rather sure I would never have told you except that circumstances seem to have forced me to it against my will."

"Is it—generally known?" Laura was staring at her now, almost as if she could not believe. Then suddenly she burst out: "Oh, Domenica, do forgive me. I didn't mean that."

"Yes, unfortunately you did mean just that. It is not generally known, and it's just to prevent its being generally known that Rossiter Byrne has practically withdrawn his defense of himself."

"You mean Brasol blackmailed you and—"

"Both me, and him. Brasol knew what he was about when he used Ross Byrne as his victim."

"He told Ross that, unless he withdrew his defense, he would betray you?"

"Exactly. That is the sort of man Ross Byrne is. Probably you are tremendously ashamed of yourself now. It will be salutary for you. Forgive me if I am harsh."

"I think perhaps you are right—within a little," Laura answered, low voiced. "I know a little of myself; I have tried— But, in any case, your secret is safe with me. I am glad Ross has done as he has done."

"Thanks, but am I safe with you?"

"Yes, of course. I shall tell Ross that you have told me, and we shall accept our lot. It means his career, my disgrace."

"There, you see. I—the real I—am not safe with you."

"I think I know what you mean, Domenica. I think, at least, that you are—somehow heroic. Perhaps— Oh, I must think it over."

"There is nothing heroic about me but my love for your father. That, I am sure, would make any woman heroic."

"And yet, your heroism is something that I feel, rather than something based on facts. If you had sacrificed— Oh, I am sorry. Let me go away now, and think about it. If you had released Ross—"

"I would have, perhaps, but that—I did not want to. I wondered if he would ask me to; he did not."

"You did not want to release him?"

"No."

"There, you see—"

"I see that I am not yet safe with you, though my secret is. Well, you had best go now, and think it over. At any rate, you are likely to keep away from Brasol's yacht. And you can, at

least, find some peace of mind with respect to Ross. That, at least, is something."

Laura left her without more words—rather slowly and thoughtfully, as if she were groping for some expression that did not come to her.

After she had gone, Domenica went to the telephone again, and again called the Styrian legation. Again Brasol was there, and she spoke to him.

"Come to me here at eleven o'clock," she told him. "I have the letter which you want. I had rather give it to you than keep it myself. That is, if it transpires that you want it."

"Of course I want it. You have done very well, Domenica," Brasol said, instantly cordial. "Do you know, there have been times when I thought I might not be able to depend on you, after all?"

"Oh, really?" she said, and rang off.

Then she sat for some time in a mood of transfigured abstraction, waiting for Byrne to come.

"'And at her feet,'" she quoted to herself, "'he bowed; where he bowed, there he fell down dead.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

Brasol had to own himself surprised that Domenica had so promptly succeeded in doing the mission he had laid upon her. He had, in reality, been not a little troubled over Laura's pressing demand to take her out to his yacht. He feared to have her go; yet had no ready pretext upon which to deny her without further exciting her suspicion.

But now that Domenica had hastened affairs, he was ready to leave at any time. No further reason for his staying in Washington. Hence he telephoned his sailing master to obtain his clearance papers for some time that afternoon, and to be ready to weigh on short notice. He canceled his order to the legation chauffeur to pick Laura up, as the previous night's appointment

had called for. Exactly how to explain to Laura he did not know. It simplified matters for him that Domenica had set her rendezvous so early. He might get away without explaining at all to Laura. For the present, until he had seen Domenica, he would simply let the matter drift, and apologize to Laura later if need be.

In the midst of that quandary, he received a telephone call from Miss Buchanan.

"Does Mr. Byrne happen to be with you?" she asked him.

"No, Miss Buchanan. I haven't seen him. Why should you think he is with me?"

"I wanted to get into touch with him rather quickly," she said. "I went out early this morning, and have just returned to find him gone. Never mind. Perhaps he is at the state department."

"I'm quite sure I don't know why he should be here," Brasol said.

"By the way, I shall not be going out to your yacht this morning. I have changed my mind. It is—no longer necessary."

"Oh, as you will. I am sorry."

She rang off with that. Brasol knew much relief. The Fates were indeed kind to him this morning. He found himself in a peculiar state of exaltation in being asked by Domenica to come to her. Not alone that his visit would mean his own safety, but as well because Domenica was what she was. None of all the women in all his life had left upon him so deep a mark as Domenica, Marchesa di Castiglione.

He went to her apartment promptly. On the stroke of eleven he had himself announced, and was shown up without delay. A very tremor of anticipation agitated him as he walked down the hall toward her suite. He was amazed that she could still affect him in this fashion. Brasol hoped that she was alone. He knew that he would still marry Domenica if she was inclined to

listen to his suit. After all, it was the most fitting possible end to her life. She might even be led to see that for herself.

Domenica was alone. She sat as she was when Laura left her—in that rather severe chaise longue; she was not even reading, but was evidently awaiting him as her chief interest.

After he had greeted her, and the door was closed behind him, he paused for a moment. The atmosphere of the room jarred on him. Never had he entered a room which was so mysteriously repellent to him. It seemed to smite him with a sort of icy hand. Nevertheless he spoke urbanely:

"What have you done for yourself, Domenica? Built a little convent here?"

"Yes, I need this sort of room, but for devotions which you might find strange indeed."

"Scarcely in keeping, is it?" He laughed uneasily.

"Not when you enter it. Still, I wanted you to come."

"That sounds more like the Domenica of old. You always were a little mad, I think, and I always liked you best when you were maddest."

"Yes, you would think that. Sit there, in the window, where the light will strike you. Do you mind? I want to see how much you have changed."

"Always a little mad," he repeated, as if the fancy pleased him, and were by that token sure to please her. "No, I'm no woman, so I don't mind the light."

He sat where she indicated.

"Not so mad when my interests are at stake," she said.

"No, no, I should say not!" He chuckled. "You've done far better than ever I thought you could. I was afraid that Byrne might be impregnable. But, after all, what man since Anthony could be impregnable before you?"

"Not even Federigo Brasol."

"Ah, Domenica, it was the other way

around, and would always have been, if you had listened to reason."

"But I chose not to, and so—well, you are still rather a potent factor in my life. Yes, in a manner of speaking, you have been since I left Budapest, but never mind about that now. I have, as I told you, Byrne's letter from Styria."

"You made him give it to you?"

"Perhaps not exactly that. He knows I have it, at any rate, and quite openly permits me to keep it."

"You've read it?"

"Yes."

"What on earth did she say?"

"Enough to be interesting."

"Let me see it."

"Presently—perhaps. I want to discuss it with you a little, first, however. That is why I brought you here."

A shade of disappointment passed over his face.

"What is there to discuss?" he asked.

"How badly do you want that letter?" she asked with directness.

"What do you mean?" He bridled angrily. "I want it, of course. Haven't I told you that?"

"Yes, but do you realize how much it is costing me to buy it?"

"It is costing you nothing, is it? Am I not giving you the opportunity to save yourself? Aren't you doing yourself a favor as well as me? Byrne is reliable. You may depend on him."

"Oh, I know that. But it means his career; it means—yes, it has actually brought him and Laura Buchanan to an open break."

"Oh, that'll heal itself, right enough."

"She is scarcely the sort of woman who would go into marriage with a man over whom there rested any sort of cloud."

"Well, the choice is yours."

"I know. I am merely trying to weigh possibilities for myself. You may remember that there was in me something of the milk of human kind-

ness. I don't want to bring too much suffering on others—Byrne and Laura—if it can be avoided."

"I don't quite follow you," he said. "There is no repeal of my ultimatum. You must do one thing or suffer the other."

"But there is another way to look at it," she went on, always calmly, almost judicially. "For me, that is. As you know, I had intended to straighten my life out by marrying Mr. Buchanan. It appears now that, if I do that, I must wreck both Byrne and Laura. I want to know something about the other possibility."

"What other possibility?"

"The possibility, let us say, of marrying you."

"Very appealing, but you wouldn't want to marry me if Byrne clears himself. I should be ruined."

"Is it really as bad as that?"

"I told you I was desperate," he declared.

"You can't have let your affairs come to this state."

"I have taken chances——"

"How is that? I have always had so much respect for you that I can scarcely believe it," she said. "I can scarcely believe that a man so shrewd, so capable as you, could have taken chances that would completely jeopardize him."

"I gambled. Safe enough gamble, except that Byrne was too clever for me."

"How? I don't understand. I am very curious, I must admit."

"I can't be telling my business to every one."

She continued imperturbably along the same line.

"But the girl's letter—is it true, Federigo, that you wanted her to get from Byrne proof he had found that you planned to overthrow the Styrian government by the assassination of the prime minister, and——"

"What madness is that? She couldn't

have known all that! Did she write that?"

"Why? Isn't it true?"

"Well—well, that is beside the point. The girl is mad. The facts are that I had had the government make application to Washington for a loan to rehabilitate our credits. The government had assigned its mines as security. Byrne got some inside information—or at least I thought he had, or was on the point of getting it, and I never knew which—that the mines were my private property in reality. I wondered how much he knew. I wanted her to find out. It was no more than that."

"Oh, yes!" Domenica said thoughtfully. "Well, let it go at that. I'd been following your career in Styria rather carefully, really. But I didn't quite know—— And I suppose you meant to divert the proceeds of the government loan to the financing of your own properties, or something like that."

"No, of course not. I'd borrowed rather heavily on government funds through one official and another, and when the franc began to go up, I lost it. I had to have some way of refunding——"

"Yes, I see. Styria will be glad to know this, of course."

"Styria? What do you mean?"

"I mean that Styria will be glad to know how her reputed benefactor benefits himself, mostly. You've just told me rather comprehensively."

Brasol stared at her.

"You propose—you think that your word would prove anything in Styria against me? The word of a discarded favorite."

"Not discarded. And not my word unsupported."

"You've led me into a trap. You've led——"

Brasol looked around wildly.

"Not your word unsupported? What do you mean by that?"

"It doesn't matter. You may go now.

I want no more of you. I shall keep the letter, by the way, which gives details of the plot to assassinate the new prime minister. It will make interesting reading for the judicial department of the government. You may go now, Federigo."

He leaped toward her.

"You'll give me that letter. You'll forget everything I have ever told you. You'll—why—why, woman, don't you realize that I have you? I mean, you daren't—"

She laughed at him.

"You haven't possession of me in any possible way, Federigo. Did you think I was really afraid to have my life with you known? It makes no difference to any one in the world but Basil Buchanan and his daughter. I told him of it the first week I knew him; and Laura will not be long in seeing the light."

"Then why——"

"Why act as if I were afraid?" she questioned. "To make sure that Mr. Byrne could clear himself. More than that, to destroy you forever on your own word. There was in reality not enough in that letter to clear him; nor had he facts enough in his possession. Not enough in the letter to destroy you, for the letter was mostly the ravings of a madwoman. But when you confess on your own word——"

"And you've simply led me into this?"

"Yes."

"But what earthly good will it do you? Give me that letter and let me go."

"Don't touch me. Stand back. I shall call for help."

"And I shall have the letter first."

He caught at her shoulders, and her throat.

"Byrne!" she called.

The door into her bedroom opened. Byrne and three or four other men came running in, and gripped Brasol, dragging him away from her. He

loosed himself from their grip, and backed up at bay against the wall. Then alone did he catch sight of Senlis, the counselor of his own legation.

"You, Senlis!" he cried. "You heard all this?"

"I have heard enough," Senlis said austere. And there was no mistaking his meaning.

"And these other men—Mr. Byrne, will you introduce them? No, I shall do it myself. Mr. Ormsby, of the British embassy, Mr. Hillyer of the state department, and the other two are police officers of Washington, in case you made things too difficult," Domenica said.

"And you," Brasol snarled at her, "let all these men know your shame?"

"I have no shame, except that you should go unpunished upon the earth. I am even safe from gossip with these men. And you are now—what are you? Impoverished, ruined, a wanderer on the face of the earth, a man without a country. Worse than death, is it not? You may not think so now, but you will. Now you may know what I suffered in Budapest. Without standing, without a country——"

Brasol interrupted:

"But you can't arrest me here. I've done nothing——"

"And I did not want you arrested. I prefer to have you wander. But try to put into any European port, if you dare, or show your face to a loyal Styrian! There is nothing more to be said. I am through. I have done all that I wanted to. Now take him away from my sight, will you, please?"

The telephone jangled a disconcerting summons.

"Will you answer it, please?" Domenica asked Byrne. "Do the rest of you mind going, now?" she added by way of safeguard.

While they filed out, Byrne listened at the telephone.

"It is Laura," he told Domenica.

"She is downstairs, and wants to see me."

"I don't think I want to see her now," Domenica said. "I am rather unnerved. Will you go down to her? I want to be alone."

"As you like. Some other time, perhaps, I can offer you some proper appreciation of my gratitude."

"It is I who am grateful to you, for the opportunity you have given me. Do you remember that sculpture in there?" she asked him. "Jael and Sisera?"

"As if I could forget it!"

"While you are gone I shall worship at that shrine—for the last time. Make your peace, and mine, with Laura, and let me hear from you soon."

Byrne found Laura waiting for him in the lounge below. The visitors had just filed past her, led by Brasol. Laura had not failed to read the connection.

"What does all that mean?" she asked.

"Come with me away from here. Is your car outside?"

"Yes. I mayn't see Domenica now?"

"Not now."

"But I must. I want to tell her—Ross, I must tell her that I have thought it over, and that—she is safe with me."

"She knows it. I made her see it, as I know it. Laura, I must tell you."

They got into the car, with indeterminate directions to the chauffeur. Laura prompted him again, now, to tell what had happened in Domenica's rooms.

And briefly he told her.

"As soon as she saw the letter, she realized that it would be insufficient to clear me, and that Brasol would undoubtedly save his skin. She evolved, by herself, the plan of having witnesses hidden, and making him incriminate himself. I fought against it, but she would not listen to me. Then I went out and got the witnesses. She is a strange woman, lovable for all that she is heroic."

"You, too, find her heroic?" Laura asked.

Byrne pictured in his mind's eye that unforgettable sculpture she had shown him.

"Yes, heroic in her hatred," he said.

"Heroic, you mean," Laura said, thinking of her father, and more particularly of what Domenica had told her, "but in her love. Beside her, I am a pygmy of women. But, Ross, you must make me grow, will you not? Perhaps my love for you can make me of such caliber as she is."

To which Byrne made the only possible reply.



WOULD you have a sure test of love? Edwin Markham, the poet, recommends that you read poetry to the young man. If he is kindled by poetry, music, art—the beautiful—then he is really in love. He isn't so much stirred by the beauty of his sweetheart's face, says the poet, as by the beauty, the poetry she herself arouses in him. So get out the love sonnets and make the test.



LADY ASTOR'S portrait, which has been covered up in the House of Commons, is something of a white elephant to the English government. Parliament finds it "undesirable as a matter of principle" to display the picture of a living member, while the Astors say the picture has been accepted by the government and is, therefore, not at their disposal. The city of Plymouth would like the picture for its art gallery, and perhaps will get it.



The Customs of Her Country

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Archipelago of Chance,"
"The Mystery at Xanadu," etc.

IT was good to be in New York again. As Winston Craye glanced about his sitting room he decided that whether home-keeping hearts were happiest or not—and a good deal of foreign travel had certainly added greatly to his zest in life—any heart was the better off for owning a home. A home might be an excellent point of departure, but it was also an admirable place to come back to.

Especially when the very best thing you had seen abroad had arrived in America on the same liner that had delivered you.

The drive through the streets, the quality of the air that is a little different from any other breathable quality, the welcome from his servant who was as safe a fixture as the furniture—all had combined to give Winston a feeling of anticipative comfort. He had expected to slip into the shell of his habitat as he would slip into an old coat. Instead, as he looked about him, he missed something. Not anything that had changed during his absence, but a desirable something that had never been there.

A classified catalogue of the objects that surrounded him would have included a good deal of his biography. The place had not been charted out by any upholsterer but had grown together through years of loving accumulation. The old mahogany writing table picked

up in Cuba, the tall Indian basket under it, the panels of Chinese embroidery on the walls—all had pedigrees of their own, no doubt, but were likewise redolent of his personal memories. A spatter of silver, a gleam of blue or gray came to him like a friendly wink of recognition. Only one object was new, and even that carried on a tradition.

In the bay window, which cut an arc of light between two dark bookcases, stood a huge pot of white hydrangeas. This curve was never without its growing plant, and he approved Rand's latest choice. The blue or pink varieties had a look of artificiality, but this mass of live-white, cone-shaped heads was as natural as a garden flower. There was something feminine about it. A honey-like fragrance hovered around it; too sweet, some people might have found it.

"But then" — Winston's thoughts shaped themselves without his help—"she likes flowers with a good deal of perfume. She was crazy about the beds of heliotrope at Cannes." He smiled a bit foolishly. This was going entirely too fast. How did he know that his horticultural furnishings would concern this girl at all? It was just his bad habit of visualizing his reflections, of following them to their probably illogical conclusions.

Ever since he had entered the room and slung his overcoat over a chair he

had been conscious of studying things with a new eye. It would be more exact to call it somebody else's eye. Those book shelves, for instance! Did women care for so many books in the place which the architect had evidently predestined for a drawing-room? Well, the books could be moved. The apartment had been too large for his needs, and one of the spare rooms at the back might be promoted into a library. The other, which had a private bath, might become an extra bedroom.

He forced himself to stop. He had no right, absolutely none, to move the girl in, in this high-handed fashion. It was a species of spiritual abduction which she would probably consider particularly offensive. Unless she cared. Did she care? There had been times when he was all but sure of it, haunting, jeweled moments that floated up to memory like brilliant sea things in tropical waters when the sun sends a wave of light through the ripples. Once he had almost spoken. What had held him back was the chill of other moments when she had withdrawn herself from him, as if she felt that she had gone too far, that she had allowed the natural comradeship of travel to glide into a familiarity which she regretted and—yes, there had been that implication—was afraid of.

Well, he wouldn't be held off any longer. The last look she had given him had been decisive. It was wonderful what she could put into her glance, seeking his out of a face that had been a little pale, a little strained. Was it unromantic to be reminded of the appeal in the beautiful eyes of a dog? A dog who asks forgiveness for some unguessing wrong, who yearns to touch you but doesn't quite dare? All the protective impulse surged up in him. Not for the first time, he suspected that she was in some trouble. It gave a deeper, keener edge to his feeling to know that instinctively she was turning

to him, in her heart, at all events. She knew that they belonged together.

He had wanted to stay and help her through the tiresome formalities over her luggage, but he had been sure that she wanted him to go. His own stuff had been passed with the minimum of trouble. After all, her brother had been there. According to his own account he was a seasoned traveler. He had stood apart, elaborately leaving them together, his restless eyes flickering over the crowd, a muscle twitching in his sunken young cheek. He was a jumpy creature—except when he was playing cards. Then he became a cool, self-possessed, rather charming person. Winston had seen drug addicts who responded in the same way to their favorite poison; who were seemingly most normal when in the most unnatural condition.

Would it be too soon, too impetuous, to call on her this very evening? Young Carrich had been pressing; had given him his card with the address so that he shouldn't forget. When Winston had assured them that there was no danger, he had dropped the card into the older man's overcoat pocket. The pocket had gaped conveniently because it already held a folded copy of *Punch*—a copy a week old but including an "Essence of Parliament" that Winston didn't want to miss, because he understood that it contained a reference to one of the most charming members of that august body, a celebrity whom he had met.

He was not well acquainted with the part of town where the Carrich's apartment was situated, but he had an impression that it was on the edge of smartness, certainly a good neighborhood. His feeling of relief made him wonder what he had expected. Well, with a man like Carrich you never could tell. Boiled down, Winston's expectation might have run: "The fellow's a gambler. You don't anticipate his be-

ing too careful of his sister." During the voyage home Carrich had left her to her own devices while he had followed his own.

Just what sort of devices were they? Was Morton Carrich only a young fool with a thirst for unwholesome excitement, or was his continuous playing in the way of business? The suspicion was disgustingly distasteful. It seemed disloyal toward Tessie. Hortense Carrich, her name was, and he had found hydrangeas, which the French call hortensias, waiting here for him. It was a good omen, a propitious sign.

After all, she ought to like his home. It was what the agent called a most desirable apartment, not far from the Avenue, well lighted, utterly comfortable. And in Rand he could offer a domesticated treasure which would be an asset, a jewel among the wedding presents of any bride. He chuckled. A faithful servant being far rarer nowadays than a kind husband, any girl ought to be willing to marry him for the sake of Rand alone. The unjustifiable sense of flooding happiness decided him. He would go that evening. Everything pointed that way.

As he picked up the overcoat and fumbled for the card, just to make sure of the number of the house, he heard the sound of voices outside in the corridor. He stood listening. Wasn't that Finlay's rich, leisurely intonation? He'd be delighted to see old Finlay. The older man had been a friend of his father's and was now growing to hold the same place with him as he approached that time of life, the late thirties, when all but the infants and the superannuated become contemporaries. But his first impulse held; he must find that card.

Rand opened the door and obliterated himself. Finlay, imposing, grizzled, urbane, with the fresh-colored, taken-care-of, slightly overnourished look of the correct New Yorker, entered to find

his friend in a state of stupefaction. Without noticing the visitor's outstretched hand, without any of the customary ceremonies of the civilized host, Winston stared down at the object he held across his own palm. His mouth gaped. He closed it, moistened his lips and ejaculated:

"Finlay! Look here! Look what I found in my pocket!"

Finlay's experienced eyes stretched and his brows ascended. He regarded the string of pearls, its diamond clasp, its whole air of patrician and insolent opulence, and replied deliberately:

"If your pocket's taken to growing things like that, I'd like to borrow your coat."

"But—but," stammered Winston, "I must have brought them in from the *Nomeric*."

"Smuggling? Fie, fie!" said Finlay reprovingly. "I ought to report you and get my share of the proceeds. Who is she? Are congratulations in order? She must be devilish attractive. No man takes such a risk for a woman who isn't."

"Stop your fooling," groaned Winston. "You don't understand. They don't belong to me."

"Stolen? Worse and worse. I shan't let you go abroad alone, if that's the effect the effete civilizations have on you. Next time I'll go along and spoil sport."

"Listen to me," urged Winston more calmly. He laid the disturbing globules on the writing table, then came over and grasped the other's hand. "First of all, overlook my rudeness, old man. I was completely bowled over. Delighted to see you, and looking so fit. Is Mrs. Finlay well? That's fine. But you don't know what this means to me. It's more than the confusion of finding myself toting valuables that aren't my property. The trouble is"—he paused, then blundered on—"I'm afraid that I know who put them there."

"In that case it's simple. Return them."

"It isn't as simple as all that. If I'm right, the fellow slipped them to me because he thought he might be searched and I looked like an honest fool that any one would trust. And he's—why, by all that's damnable, he's turned me into a smuggler."

"Then report him."

Winston's tone wilted.

"I can't." The other frowned, slightly obtruding a jaw that might on occasion grow steely. Judge Finlay was credited with a pretty wit, and he had been accused of playing it pretty far, even from the bench, but he recognized a serious situation when he encountered one. It was the tone, not of the lawyer but of the perfect confidant, which asked:

"Why not?"

"Because he has a sister."

"Ah!" said Finlay. He wanted to add that he was surprised that a man of Winston's age and experience hadn't learned enough yet to keep out of the claws of shady sirens. Having himself mastered discretion, he waited for more data before expressing himself. His face must have betrayed him, however, because Winston broke out warmly:

"It isn't what you suppose, in the least. She's a thoroughly nice girl." The absurd inadequacy of the phrase forced a smile from him. She was an adorable girl, the masterpiece of nature, as the old writers put it.

"Suppose you tell me about it." Finlay lifted the pearls and carried them to the window where he turned them tenderly in the light. "Who are these people?"

"Their name is Carrich." Winston handed the card over.

"Never heard of them. However, that means nothing. New York is always full of migratory waves. Where do they come from?"

"California." Winston put together

the few facts that Carrich had volunteered. "They were visiting a relative in Cannes when I met them—a rich old invalid, a widow, who had an excellent position. They've lived in New York, off and on, for some time. Travel a good deal. Seem to be well enough off." He recalled the prosperous look of the brother. The girl, now he came to think of it, though always charmingly dressed, had clung to simplicity. No jewels, certainly.

"What's his business?"

Carrich had been vague about that. It appeared to be something between the activities of a promoter and those of an agent for introducing new and expensive goods into European markets. He had been interested in machinery, in small but miraculous devices that might revolutionize certain processes. A great deal of money and much secrecy were involved, Winston had gathered. Carrich had not even mentioned the name of his firm, and Winston had not been greatly interested.

"You don't think the whole thing was an excuse, a blind for masking his real business, whatever that might be?"

"I don't know. Perhaps," Winston admitted. He was perfectly willing to distrust Carrich; always had been. And at present he was full of seething anger at the trick which had been played on him. The atmosphere of suspicion engendered in his mind by Finlay's speech made him ask suddenly:

"Are those pearls genuine?"

Finlay weighed them in his palm thoughtfully.

"I'm no expert, but I should say that they were, and very fine specimens. Imitation ones would be lighter—though they may arrange that, too, they make them so well."

There was the sound of an opened door, the murmur of voices in the passage. This time Rand came in with a card. Winston handed it silently to his friend; it was the duplicate of the

card which he had recently been scrutinizing.

"The gentleman says it's very important, sir. He hopes you'll see him."

"Yes, I'll see him," Winston answered grimly. "Don't go, Finlay. His call is singularly apposite. I'd like a witness."

Finlay laid the pearls down on the spot from which he had got them. Against the dark wood they glowed like a small Milky Way.

"I have an idea that I might cramp the young man's style," he observed. "I'll wait in your dining room. Call me if you need me." Selecting a book from the nearest shelf he withdrew behind one door as Rand ushered in, through the other, a slim, wiry youth. One received the impression that, so far as grooming and self-restraint could do it, the newcomer had tried to make himself correctly inconspicuous and had failed. He had the race-horse quality, the neurotic excitability that one finds oftener in Latins than in Americans. The tilt of his eyebrows accentuated the foreign look. He would have been handsome except for the unwholesome deadness of the skin and his emaciation. His hair was carefully arranged to conceal an incipient baldness.

"Good morning once more, Mr. Craye," he said cheerfully. "I hope I haven't disturbed you, coming so very promptly."

For the second time that day Winston neglected to shake hands with the incoming guest, but on this occasion the oversight was intentional. While Carrich pretended to ignore the discourtesy, his glance roamed about the room, giving it, the owner felt sure, a swift appraisal, not in terms of its artistic or human values, but in terms of dollars. Then the young man jumped. His face lit up with an avid pleasure; relief flashed in his onyx-brown eyes. He advanced to the writing table, on the other side of which Winston was

standing. From his lips came the long-drawn murmur of complete satisfaction with which the lover meets the object of his devotion. With a soft, catlike movement of gentle rapacity, he put out his hand, letting it hover over the pearls, voluptuously lingering over the imminent certainty of contact.

The instant before that hand settled down on them Winston pulled open the table drawer and brusquely swept the string into it. The lock snapped, significant and loud in the silence. The movement had been so unexpected that Carrich straightened and moved back, as if from a blow. His face flamed; the whole bony structure of it seemed to come forward, making it old, horribly like a skeleton. This time it was impossible for him to ignore the insult. The two men glared into each other's faces. Carrich recovered himself first.

"That was rather unnecessary, Mr. Craye," he said. An expression of injured innocence wiped out the traces of his anger. "Of course, the pearls are mine. I came to apologize for taking the liberty that I did, and explaining that—well, explaining. I was certain that I wasn't letting you in for any unpleasantness or I shouldn't have done it."

"You made me behave like a crook—as I suppose you're in the habit of behaving," retorted Winston.

The other retained his deprecating manner, without an effort.

"Now don't you think that's exaggerating a bit? Nobody considers getting around the customs in the light of a crime, you know. I've known awfully nice people—women, too—who thought it rather clever. I'm sorry you feel that way about it." His persistent intention of disarming Winston's displeasure produced the opposite effect of raising it to the boiling point. "Well, all I can do is to ask your pardon. My mistake. And now, if you'll give me the string, I'll

relieve you of my presence. I can't flatter myself that you're finding it a pleasure."

"How do I know that the pearls belong to you?" demanded Winston. To keep his hands off the young scoundrel he had to remind himself that he was, strange as it seemed, Tessie's brother.

"Why, you know they are," Carrich responded patiently. "Not a minute ago you were giving me the devil for putting them in your pocket. Why on earth do you suppose they're not mine?"

"Simply and solely because you say they are. I don't trust you. If you defended a self-evident proposition, I'd suspect a flaw in it. You say the pearls are yours. Well, the burden of proof is on you."

"Oh, that's prejudice," said Carrich. Then his self-control buckled, his hands began to work. "What right have you to keep them?" he broke out. "Whoever owns them, you don't. Give them to me." His voice rose to the whine of an angry child.

"If you don't like it, prove your ownership. Or, if you prefer, go to the police."

The last word brought Carrich's head up with a jerk. It was as though he believed that at last he understood the situation; he had struck familiar ground. A new insolence emboldened him.

"So that's the game," he drawled. "I hand it to you. You know I can't put the police wise because they'd confiscate the stuff and fine me besides. So you sweep the pretties into your drawer and keep quiet, and that's that. Neat! If I report you for bringing them in, you explain that I foisted them on you. And they'll believe you, I know that. Perfect. That's the beauty of having a clear and spotless record behind you—you can take advantage of it."

"Shut up!" said Winston. He did not raise his voice but Carrich did shut

up. "You know better than to believe that putrid stuff. It may interest you to hear that, so far from keeping quiet, I've already told the story to a man of whom you've probably heard, a man as absolutely above suspicion——"

"A point very well taken," said Finlay's agreeable voice. Neither of the others knew how long he had been standing there, like a dispassionate spectator, one finger in his book keeping his place, as though he found the scene interesting but was holding in reserve the possibly more remunerative plan of going back to his reading.

Carrich stared at him. The sallow color ebbed from his face and he regained his clutch on his temper. He was evidently unaware of the fact that it would not have occurred to Judge Finlay to eavesdrop; in fact, he took the contrary for granted. He changed his tactics.

"I'm sorry I said what I did just now," he said with a gulp. "Of course I didn't mean it. But I had supposed, Mr. Craye, that you were willing to help me—us—when we were in a tight place. At least that you were willing to help Tessie."

After a distinct pause Winston asked: "What has your sister to do with this?"

"They're really her pearls. Our aunt, Madame Duclos, gave them to her, over in Cannes. She's an invalid, may die any time, and she said—she's as cool as a cucumber about her own condition—that Tessie might as well have them now and save the death duties. As a matter of fact"—he hesitated, then made up his mind that safety lay in candor—"they're pretty nearly everything of value we've got left. I ought to have run over to Holland and disposed of them there, but I had hoped to make something out of this trip, one way or the other, instead of being cleaned out as I was, and I hated to ask Tessie for them. You see, I've

been unfortunate with her property as well as my own."

"Yes, I see," said Winston wearily. He felt incapable of listening to any more. His imagination started to work again. What a life the girl must have had! He could feel its bitterness in his own flesh and spirit—the long years of disillusionment, the steady bleeding, not only of her material goods, but of her faith in her brother—perhaps, because of him, of her faith in mankind. And she was still clinging to the cub, still putting her frail, pathetic body between him and the world. The meaning of numbers of little incidents came back, piteous acts of protection, of glossing over unpleasantness. Very few men go under finally without carrying with them some woman who struggles, until the very last minute, to save, not herself—no, but to keep some beloved head above water.

"I see," Winston repeated. "She gave you the pearls so that you could declare them. And you confided them to my care to save the money."

"Not quite." He hesitated, whether to arrange his story or not Winston could not tell. "No. She knew I didn't have money enough to pay the duty. She knew that I might be searched—I have been before this—and she might be, too, because she was with me. And so—"

"Yes?"

"When she was saying good-by to you, while we were on the dock, she slipped the string into your pocket."

Finlay laid a restraining hand on his friend's arm.

"I don't believe that story," he observed. "Anyway, on your own showing, you are not the proper person to receive the pearls. Your sister is. Mr. Craye would certainly not be justified in handing them over to you."

"Why not?" flared Carrich. Then he said sullenly: "Oh, all right. It amounts to the same thing."

As though the pressure of remaining in the room was becoming too much for his nerves, Winston caught up his overcoat from the chair and swung into the passage. The outer door closed emphatically. As he had passed Finlay he had given him a sort of nod of apology and leave-taking which the judge understood. Turning to Carrich and making no effort to hide his contempt, Finlay said:

"We need hardly wait."

"I think I shall," said the young man defiantly.

"I think not. Of course Mr. Craye has gone to your sister, to find out whether she will corroborate your story." His manner implied, "If you have anything to say, it might be as well for you to be present at the interview. You can have no further business here."

Carrich took the hint. He lingered in the passage, glancing uncertainly at the various doors, but before he reached the outer hall Finlay joined him. Neither spoke until they reached the street. Then Carrich flashed at his companion the pleasant smile with which he met a suspicious and antagonistic world.

"Good-by, Judge Finlay," he said.

"Rather, *au revoir*," the other answered deliberately. "I have a presentiment that we shall meet again." He walked briskly away.

Carrich's smile held mechanically. Now what was the meaning of that? He had indeed heard of Finlay. Finlay was a judge in the Federal courts, and smuggling is an offense against the government. Young Carrich shrugged his shoulders and hailed a passing taxi. He had no time to lose.

He congratulated himself on his promptness when, on reaching his abode, he discovered Winston Craye on the doorstep, in the act of ringing the bell. They went in together.

It was, as Winston had surmised, an

excellent neighborhood, but it* was equally obvious that everything had been sacrificed to the advantages of a good address. The apartment that belonged to the Carrich's was probably the least desirable one in the building, looking out on a shady and unattractive court. Details obtruded themselves on his attention that under other circumstances he would not have noticed. The sitting room into which he was taken had received the hurried care of a busy woman who intended to come back to it when she had time. What was solid and durable was good; there was a delightful gate table and some fiddle-back chairs; but what was new, and susceptible to the vicissitudes of daily use, was cheap and worn. The pictures, though attractive, were of no special value. Had they been, he suspected, they would have been turned into money long ago. Still there was about the place an air of charm, of comfort. That was Tessie's doing, of course.

After her brother had sung out her name and she had answered from the recesses of the apartment, she kept them waiting for several minutes. Craye knew that she was being called from putting some other room to rights. Had she no servant, he wondered. With an exaggeration of fair play, Carrich refrained from seeking her. The visitor should have no right to suspect that he intended to prepare Tessie, to coach her in what she was to say. Everything was to be open and aboveboard. He kept up a conversation on trifles, new shows, political happenings, in a high, genial tone that was intended to reach his sister and assure her of the pleasant relations which obtained between Mr. Craye and himself.

Tessie came in a little out of breath, but charming in a house gown of blue and white, the waves of her bright brown hair as smooth as ever. The tiny uplift of the brows which was sinister in her brother only gave to her face a

piquant, unusual quality. He added this new phase of Tessie, the domestic one, to the long gallery of his recollections. Then the full meaning of his presence here surged over him. How was he to begin? What was he to believe?

"I'm afraid this is an unconscionably early call," he blundered. "It's most difficult to explain." He stopped in misery. It was monstrous, what he had to tell her. Now that he was actually close to her, it became impossible. Any question was an accusation.

Carrich interrupted him, if one can interrupt a silence.

"It's just this, Tessie. Mr. Craye wants you to tell him one thing. Did you or did you not put a string of pearls in his pocket this morning?" He spoke as though this might have been the most natural action that any young woman might have done—nothing singular about it at all.

Before Craye could get out his protest the young man hurried on:

"I know what you're thinking, Mr. Craye. You're afraid that I'm telling my sister what to say, suggesting, giving her some signal. Well, I'm not. I've asked her a straight question and I want her to give you a straight answer." His voice slurred into a sneer. "Mr. Craye declined to accept my word, Tessie. He prefers to think that I did the deed, but he won't return the pearls until you tell him that they belong to you. Now speak up—did you or not?"

During this speech Winston had looked at nothing but the girl. Whether Carrich was giving a signal made no difference to him. He saw Tessie's lips part, grow stiff, the color leave her face. She was suffering as much as he was. No wonder, poor child! Who could tell how long she had been waiting for some blow to fall, some crisis to declare itself, for the inevitable day when her brother would be found out? She couldn't be ignorant of the crooked-

ness which he, from the beginning, had felt in Carrich.

When she spoke, the words falling like expressionless nonsense from her lips, Winston was not surprised, only abysmally sorry for her. Didn't he know the self-abnegation of her type?

Years after, strolling again through a garden on the Riviera, he had stopped suddenly before a group of young acacias, wondering why a sharp, wretched pang had gone through him, without warning. The sea wind was shaking the delicate, cream-pink flowers, and suddenly he remembered Tessie's hands. They had remained for him the symbols of unutterable misery, dread, shirinking.

It was all he could do now not to take them in, his own, to assure her that she had nothing to fear—nothing at all.

"Yes, I did," said Tessie.

Carrich threw a triumphant gesture at his accuser. Winston took a step forward. He would have been close enough to the girl to touch her, had she not shrunk back until the wall stopped her. Her fingers went back, seeking it, as though its stability were a help. She refused to meet his eyes, even when he spoke with a gentleness as intimate as solitude could have made it.

"You don't expect me to believe that. You're protecting your brother. Don't be afraid to tell me the truth. I wouldn't harm you for the world—nor any one belonging to you." With the thirst for reality between them, for the brushing away of misunderstanding, he went on: "You gave them to him to declare, didn't you? Or did he simply take them from you?"

Her head strained away from him but the color was ebbing back into her face. Her chest lifted, and in another moment she was herself again, quiet and on guard. The long habit of her life sustained her. So long as she had to look out for Morton she had no time to think of herself.

"You don't understand," she said clearly. "I did slip them in your pocket. Then I sent Morton to your rooms for them. Really, really, I'm telling you what's so."

Winston stood quite still. The ridiculous idea came to him that he was being subjected to a frightful change of temperature, like a man dumped out of a warmed and lighted ship into the glacial sea. He could feel cold waves penetrating his skin, forming an icy crust around his heart.

Then the inner voice that watches its chance and finds it when a man's nature has received a shock, the critical, censorious voice, woke in his brain. What had he expected—perfection? Where was the son of Adam who hadn't put some woman on a pedestal and found, after a while, that there was one more pedestal in the world to let? How many women would consider the trick that had been played on him as no more than a joke? Yes, but not this girl. Who was Tessie—the real Tessie? The creature whom he had met in the lovely frame of the azure coast, as delectably white and glowing as a pearl, or the little nomad, the sister of a crook, who could take advantage of his devotion like this? Because she must have counted on that. She was safe with him, no matter what she did. She knew that she had a bit in his mouth and could lead him wheresoever she wanted to. Could she, though?

All the while a second voice was furiously denying the first one. Another personality in him was arguing that there was a flaw in this cynical logic. He couldn't get used to such a rightabout face in the most significant values, the most important matters.

"But you'll have to," reiterated the sneerer. "You will."

His own voice sounded tired and monotonous when he spoke.

"Very well. In that case, there is no more to be said."

Young Carrich accepted his victory with a man-of-the-world air. His face was working with excitement, but he held himself in.

"As I always say, let bygones be bygones," he announced handsomely. "And now, Tessie, get on your things and we'll go together to Mr. Craye's place, if it won't be inconveniencing him. He can put the stuff into your own hands this time, if it will make him feel more comfortable. I'll go down and get a taxi." He disappeared like an eel through the door. As the girl started to follow him Winston stopped her.

"I don't understand all this, but I'm sure that you haven't told me everything," he said. A tingle went through him as she gazed into his eyes at last, the gratitude in hers assuring him that he was right. "I suspect that you've been sacrificing yourself to your brother all along, rectifying his—mistakes, as far as you could." He took her hands and she let them stay helplessly in his clasp. "Tessie, Tessie, darling, don't you think it's time to stop, time to consider your own life—and mine? You've done all you can for him, child. You know as well as I do that some people can't be made over, can't be forced to go straight. They end by dragging down with them those who try to redeem them. Forgive me, but your brother is one of the hopeless ones, one of the unfit. Look what he's made you do already!"

In her sick glance he saw the reflection of his own belief. She knew it. She had known it for a long time, had been fighting against the certainty of ultimate failure, hoping against hope.

"Don't, please, don't," she moaned.

"I must. I can't see you making shipwreck of your own sweet, adorable nature. Even if he could be braced up and made worth while—and I don't believe it—he would need some powerful, stern man to work the miracle, not a girl like you, whom he feels that he has

under his control. You're immolating yourself for nothing—just nothing. You have no real influence; you can't lead him. You can only follow, picking up the pieces, smoothing over difficulties, not making them any better. Isn't that so?"

She knew that it was.

"And he's getting away from you. On the ship you couldn't keep him out of the game, could you? He's beginning to undermine your own standards, making you act against your principles, lest worse should happen. Didn't he force you, this morning, to——"

Her eyes begged for mercy, but he went on inexorably.

"Give it up, Tessie, give it up. You've done all you could do. It will only end in misery and humiliation and—yes, perhaps danger, for you. Let me take you out of it, out of this life he makes for you."

She shook her head.

"Why not?" He drew her to him.

"I must stay here. I am a restraint. He'd be worse alone."

"Not a bit of it," he said robustly. "You don't keep him away from anything he chooses to do. Come to me and be happy. You will be happy, I swear it."

"I can't," she murmured. She freed herself.

Winston drew a long breath. How could a wisp of humanity, so soft and gentle and tenuous, be so stonily obstinate? He wanted to crush her to him, overwhelm her with the force of his devotion, but he only said with a sincerity that was beyond question.

"This is very hard on me, Tessie."

This egotistical remark seemed to shake her resolution more than anything that had gone before. Emboldened, he pushed his advantage.

"Don't you care for me? Couldn't you be happy as my wife?"

"Oh, yes!" she breathed. "But—but I can't leave him."

Winston's arms were around her. Then she sprang back. The door opened, and Carrich came in, as heartlessly gay and pleased with himself as a gutter sparrow.

During the drive to Winston's apartment, the burden of the conversation rested on Morton's shoulders. Winston gave him a perfunctory answer now and then. He was obsessed by the strangeness of life. Only that day he had imagined Tessie in his rooms, placed her there with infinite love and reverence. Well, here she was, but with a difference. As though she felt it—felt that she was on sufferance, with no right to enter—she ignored the chair that he drew up for her and remained standing.

He found an obscure comfort in the glance she allowed herself. She liked the room. As she wistfully lingered over the books he knew that she loved them. Perhaps they wouldn't have been turned out, after all.

He took a long, thin, brass key from his pocket and fitted it into the lock of the writing table's drawer. As he opened it, Winston felt Carrich craning over his shoulder. Both stared into the aperture; then Winston began removing papers, pen handles, sealing wax, other trifles. He ended by upsetting the drawer itself on the top of the table. He hunted feverishly through the pile.

The pearls were not there. They had disappeared as completely as though they had never existed.

"Look in the scrap basket," suggested Carrich wildly. He pounced on the tall cylinder, turned it upside down, and maltreated it. Nothing emerged except a mussed piece of cloth which the admirable Rand—none of us being perfect—had for once neglected to remove after dusting the bottom with it.

"They're gone," said Winston stupidly. It was a self-evident fact, but this day had been presenting him with

one unbelievable occurrence after another. "It is impossible that any one should have opened this drawer," he went on, arguing the question with the accomplished fact. "It has a spring lock and the key was in my pocket all the time."

"Exactly," said Carrich.

There was a nastiness in the words, a barely veiled implication, that brought Winston upright.

"What do you mean to imply by that?"

"You've said it yourself."

"Oh, Morton," wailed the girl. He answered her with a sharpness that betrayed a habit:

"Now, sis, you keep out of this. I saw him put those pearls in there, and"—his voice rose in relief—"I've got a witness—one that Mr. Craye himself says is above suspicion—Judge Finlay. If he didn't actually see the string go into the drawer, he heard Mr. Craye refuse to give them back to me. Well, they're gone. If the lock's burglar proof, what are we to think? All I can say is, hand over the pearls and we'll say no more about it. Otherwise——"

"No lock is burglar proof," cried Tessie. "I see what happened. While Mr. Craye was out somebody came in and stole them. Perhaps somebody who had overheard."

"If you mean my servant, I'd trust him anywhere. It's impossible that the drawer was opened," Winston persisted. "It's exactly like magic. It almost convinces me of the existence of the fourth dimension. That's the only thing that would explain it."

"It doesn't convince me of any such thing," Carrich said insolently. "When people begin to talk of magic, either I——"

"Hush! What can you do, Morton?" Tessie's voice silenced him. "There's no use threatening. You can't report the pearls. They were smuggled."

"Exactly," said Carrich again. "That,

no doubt, is what Mr. Craye remembered," was what his manner indicated, though he did not utter the words. Winston turned to the girl, ignoring him.

"I can only say this. Your property has disappeared while it was in my charge. Of course I hold myself responsible."

Carrich gave a crow. His manner instantly acquired a cordiality that was rather more offensive than his insinuations.

"Why, then, that's all right," he exclaimed. "Very handsome, I'm sure. They're worth quite a lot, you know. I'm sure I ask your pardon, Mr. Craye. I might have known you'd make them good. What would you say they're worth, Tessie? I know Aunt Stephanie valued them—".

"Hush!" Tessie said again, her voice dragging with humiliation. "How can you? I've been ashamed of you before, Morton, but never as I am now. Hush! I shan't let Mr. Craye suffer. I shouldn't even—" She hesitated, and her brother demanded:

"Even what?"

"Even if they were real."

"Real?" shouted Morton. "Of course, they're real. I've heard of Aunt Stephanie's pearls all my life. Didn't she give them to you to avoid the death duties?" He was entirely in earnest.

"She gave me two strings—the pearls and an imitation duplicate she had had made. She told me many women wore those because they were afraid of risking their valuable jewels. They only appeared on special occasions." A new pride lifted her head. "Do you imagine that I should have let Mr. Craye bring in anything but beads? Do you imagine I'd have tricked him into doing anything that wasn't right?"

Winston dropped his eyes. The cynical inner voice was sneering at him; "Got you that time, didn't I?" No,

not quite. He had protested. He had not been convinced by it.

"Then where are the real ones?" shouted Carrich.

"I sold them."

Carrich gasped, choked by a torrent of questions.

"I sold them to that old Mr. Mapleson who used to walk with us at Cannes. He was a collector of jewels and more or less in the business. He gave me an honest price and promised to keep the secret. I told him my reasons."

In a sort of icy snarl Carrich demanded:

"What's become of the money?"

She was bracing herself, Winston could see, not to be afraid of her brother. The mask of fury that looked as though it were aching to bite her—how many times she must have confronted it, pacified it, made it human again. She answered him calmly:

"I paid our debts. I know you think that we left a trail of them across Europe, besides what you had left here. Well, we didn't. I paid everything—everything."

The stream of abuse broke loose. His fist flew up. Probably it was no more than a spasmodic gesture of rage, but before it could move Winston had caught the wrist. With a choke Carrich wilted. His onyx eyes filled with tears. Obeying the propulsion of his host's iron fingers, he moved to the door. On the threshold he tore himself loose, wheeled, and glowered back at his sister, who had dropped into a chair and hidden her face in her hands.

"All right," he said in a dry, vitriolic undertone, "I'll go. I just want to say this much. I've done with you. You knew what I wanted that money for. You knew it was my last chance to put across that deal I told you about. All right. Now you've squandered it you needn't look to me to take care of you any longer. You can shift for your-

self. I never want to see you again. I've done with you." The door shut him out.

Winston lifted Tessie to his arms. She leaned against him, crying silently, for a little while. When she could trust her voice she said:

"I'm ashamed—ashamed."

"You've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"I was a coward. I didn't dare to tell him, so I let him persuade me to drop them into your pocket. I meant to tell you later."

"Never mind about that," Winston assured her. "You're free, Tessie. You can come to me with a perfectly clear conscience." Under her touch an extraordinary change had taken place in his whole outlook. He began to laugh. Almost he could feel kindly to that poor fool Morton, because he had done his atrocious worst and taken himself off.

Tessie smiled like a feminine echo.

"I wish you liked somebody nicer. We're not nice people, are we?"

"You," Winston informed her solemnly, "are quite the nicest person in the world." He let her go reluctantly. It was his fate to be interrupted, but there would be to-morrows.

"Come in," he said resignedly.

The admirable Rand announced Judge Finlay, who came blandly through the doorway, explaining his errand as he came.

"This is what my mother used to call a peacock visit, Craye, right on the heels of the last one. I've been haunted by that book of yours—came to borrow it. I beg your pardon——"

"Judge Finlay, one of my oldest friends. Miss Carrich, my fiancée," said Winston, rather resembling a peacock himself, in his unabashed happiness and pride.

The judge rose to the occasion. No one could be more charming when he

chose. It was not only natural but inevitable that the whole story of the pearls should be disclosed to him, since he had assisted at the first scene. At the end Winston inquired:

"What do you make of the mystery, Finlay? Mysteries are in your line."

An infinitely sly smile irradiated the judge's lightly-sketched wrinkles. "If I wanted to acquire kudos as a seer, I might treat it as an extraordinary disappearance. But it's perfectly simple."

He was rewarded by the look of helpless admiration on the face of the sweetly pretty young lady.

"The truth of the matter was," he began judicially, "the pearls never went into the drawer at all. You two fighting cocks were glaring into each other's eyes and noticed nothing else. When you swept up the pearls, Winston, they skated across the top of the drawer, which was only open a crack, and fell——"

"Where?" cried Tessie.

"Neatly into that scrap basket, which is tall enough to reach nearly to the table, and which was conveniently in a position to receive them. The cloth in it deadened any sound."

"But we looked into the basket," Winston interrupted.

"Yes," said Finlay, "but I looked first."

He gave this time to settle, then continued:

"Far be it from me to eavesdrop. I entered the room in the most open manner, but both of you were too much absorbed by your own bellicose affairs to notice me. I found myself alone for a couple of seconds after I got Carrich out of the room, after your departure. Somehow a scrap basket has never appealed to me as a receptacle for jewels. Naturally I believed the pearls to be genuine. The question was, where to secrete them until your return? You may have gathered by this time, that my second visit here was inspired by

more than the desire to get that book; I also wanted to reveal the hiding place I selected."

"Where?" Winston demanded.

With maddening deliberation Finlay resumed his tale:

"First I thought of putting them simply in my pocket until I saw you. But I am a cautious man. If I had been run over and those pearls found in my possession, some evil-minded persons might have said things. No, Winston, no man is safe from slander. Then I thought of Poe's story of the 'Purloined Letter,' and of the most obvious hiding place being the best. I also thought of Chesterton's Father Brown story, where it is written that the safest place to hide a leaf is on a tree. Like to like."

"You seem to have done a vast amount of thinking in that couple of seconds," observed Winston.

"My mind works rapidly," replied Finlay complacently. "The upshot of the matter was that I sought in this room the object which most resembled a string of pearls—and found it."

He rose, walked over to the bay window, and fumbled among the opulent, exquisite white heads of the hydrangea. The sun brought out pearly reflections in the planes of white as they moved under his hands. He fished out the string of deceit and solemnly presented it to Miss Carrich, who thanked him.

"It would have made a better story if they had been real," said Winston.

"It would have made a far better story if I had been run over," the judge retorted, "with the things in my pocket. But, as a story, I prefer it in its present form. By the way, Miss Carrich, I threatened this morning to chaperon Winston, but I had no idea that my services would be needed so soon. I intend to take you both to my house, where Mrs. Finlay will be delighted to give us lunch, late as it is. And then"—his eyebrow lifted and his hands reached for Tessie's—"and then I think

she will insist upon keeping this dear young lady with her until Winston takes her away. After all, we are his best friends."

"Thank you," said Winston, more moved than he cared to show.

"I left that book on your dining table, I believe," Finlay hurried on, evading thanks. As a matter of fact he had a distinct recollection of having replaced it on its shelf, just behind him. He smiled to himself as he left them together and passed into the next room. "A merciful man is merciful to the young," he told himself. "He hardly wants a witness for this interview. They probably won't have another minute alone for several hours." He put in his time admiring a Queen Anne urn on the sideboard, and thought of his own youth when he had courted a slim-hipped, flaxen-haired minx, who only faintly resembled the plump and placid Mrs. Finlay, for whom, nevertheless, he had a warm regard. "Oh, romance, romance," said the judge severely to the Queen Anne urn. "Blind and beautiful. She doesn't dream that he'll grow bald and gouty, and he hasn't the slightest suspicion that she'll put on flesh, and it hasn't yet occurred to him that you marry, not a girl, but her tribe also. That young blighter of a brother is sure to bob up and give them trouble. What's married life anyway? Years of prose, long intervals of worry, and pearls of great price that more often than not turn out to be false. And very brief seasons of rapture that try to persuade you that they, in spite of their brevity, make life worth living and love worth while."

His face broke into a smile of reminiscence. His ear cocked toward a soft murmur that reached him from the room where the pearly flowers bloomed.

"And I'll be hanged if I don't believe that they prove their case—the *they do* make it worth while," Judge Finlay handed down his opinion.

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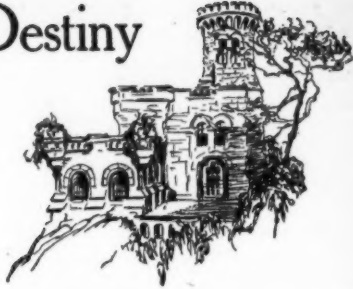
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The Roads of Destiny

By O. Henry

(Reprinted by request)



"I go to seek on many roads

What is to be.

True heart and strong, with love to light—

Will they not bear me in the flight

To order, shun or wield or mold

My Destiny?"

—*Unpublished Poems of David Mignot.*

THE song was over. The words were David's; the air, one of the countryside. The company about the inn table applauded heartily, for the young poet paid for the wine. Only the notary, M. Papineau, shook his head a little at the lines, for he was a man of books, and he had not drunk with the rest.

David went out into the village street, where the night air drove the wine vapor from his head. And then he remembered that he and Yvonne had quarreled that day, and that he had resolved to leave his home that night to seek fame and honor in the great world outside.

"When my poems are on every man's tongue," he told himself, in a fine exhilaration, "she will, perhaps, think of the hard words she spoke this day."

Except the roisterers in the tavern, the village folk were abed. David crept softly into his room in the shed of his father's cottage and made a bundle of his small store of clothing. With this upon a staff, he set his face outward upon the road that ran from Vernoy.

He passed his father's herd of sheep

huddled in their nightly pen—the sheep he herded daily, leaving them to scatter while he wrote verses on scraps of paper. He saw a light yet shining in Yvonne's window, and a weakness shook his purpose of a sudden. Perhaps that light meant that she rued, sleepless, her anger, and that morning might— But, no! His decision was made. Vernoy was no place for him. Not one soul there could share his thoughts. Out along that road lay his fate and his future.

Three leagues across the dim, moonlit champaign ran the road, straight as a plowman's furrow. It was believed in the village that the road ran, at least, to Paris; and this name the poet whispered often to himself as he walked. Never so far from Vernoy had David traveled before.

THE LEFT BRANCH.

Three leagues, then, the road ran, and turned into a puzzle. It joined with another and a larger road at right angles. David stood, uncertain, for a while, and then took the road to the left.

Upon this more important highway were imprinted in the dust wheel tracks left by the recent passage of some vehicle. Some half an hour later these traces were verified by the sight of a ponderous carriage mired in a little brook at the bottom of a steep hill. The driver and postilions were shouting and tugging at the horses' bridles. On the

road at one side stood a huge, black-clothed man and a slender lady wrapped in a long, light cloak.

David saw the lack of skill in the efforts of the servants. He quietly assumed control of the work. He directed the outriders to cease their clamor at the horses and to exercise their strength upon the wheels. The driver alone urged the animals with his familiar voice; David himself heaved a powerful shoulder at the rear of the carriage, and with one harmonious tug the great vehicle rolled up on solid ground. The outriders climbed to their places.

David stood for a moment upon one foot. The huge gentleman waved a hand. "You will enter the carriage," he said, in a voice large, like himself, but smoothed by art and habit. Obedience belonged in the path of such a voice. Brief as was the young poet's hesitation it was cut shorter still by a renewal of the command. David's foot went to the step. In the darkness he perceived dimly the form of the lady upon the rear seat. He was about to seat himself opposite, when the voice again swayed him to its will. "You will sit at the lady's side."

The gentleman swung his great weight to the forward seat. The carriage proceeded up the hill. The lady was shrunk, silent, into her corner. David could not estimate whether she was old or young, but a delicate, mild perfume from her clothes stirred his poet's fancy to the belief that there was loveliness beneath the mystery. Here was an adventure such as he had often imagined. But as yet he held no key to it, for no word was spoken while he sat with his impenetrable companions.

In an hour's time David perceived through the window that the vehicle traversed the street of some town. Then it stopped in front of a closed and darkened house, and a postilion alighted to hammer impatiently upon the door. A latticed window above

flew wide and a nightcapped head popped out.

"Who are ye that disturb honest folk at this time of night? My house is closed. 'Tis too late for profitable travelers to be abroad. Cease knocking at my door, and be off."

"Open!" spluttered the postilion, loudly; "open for Monseigneur, the Marquis de Beaupertuys."

"Ah!" cried the voice above. "Ten thousand pardons, my lord. I did not know—the hour is so late—at once shall the door be opened, and the house placed at my lord's disposal."

Inside was heard the clink of chain and bar, and the door was flung open. Shivering with chill and apprehension, the landlord of the Silver Flagon stood, half clad, candle in hand, upon the threshold.

David followed the marquis out of the carriage.

"Assist the lady," he was ordered. The poet obeyed. He felt her small hand tremble as he guided her descent. "Into the house," was the next command.

The room was the long dining hall of the tavern. A great oak table ran down its length. The huge gentleman seated himself in a chair at the nearer end. The lady sank into another against the wall, with an air of great weariness. David stood, considering how best he might now take his leave and continue upon his way.

"My lord," said the landlord, bowing to the floor, "h-had I ex-expected this honor, entertainment would have been ready. T-t-there is wine and cold fowl and m-m-maybe——"

"Candles," said the marquis, spreading the fingers of one plump, white hand in a gesture he had.

The landlord bowed.

"Y-yes, my lord." He fetched half a dozen candles, lighted them, and set them upon the table.

"If monsieur would, perhaps, deign

to taste a certain Burgundy—there is a cask——”

“Candles,” said monsieur, spreading his fingers.

“Assuredly—quickly—I fly, my lord.”

A dozen more lighted candles shone in the hall. The great bulk of the marquis overflowed his chair. He was dressed in fine black from head to foot save for the snowy ruffles at his wrists and throat. Even the hilt and scabbard of his sword were black. His expression was one of sneering pride. The ends of an upturned mustache reached nearly to his mocking eyes.

The lady sat, motionless, and now David perceived that she was young, and possessed of pathetic and appealing beauty. He was startled from the contemplation of her forlorn loveliness by the booming voice of the marquis.

“What is your name and pursuit.”

“David Mignot. I am a poet.”

The mustache of the marquis curled nearer to his eyes.

“How do you live?”

“I am also a shepherd; I guarded my father’s flock,” David answered, with his head high, but a flush upon his cheek.

“Then listen, master shepherd and poet, to the fortune you have blundered upon to-night. This lady is my niece, Mademoiselle Lucie de Varennes. She is of noble descent and is possessed of ten thousand francs a year in her own right. As to her charms, you have but to observe for yourself. If the inventory pleases your shepherd’s heart, she becomes your wife at a word. Do not interrupt me. To-night I conveyed her to the château of the Comte de Villemaur, to whom her hand had been promised. Guests were present; the priest was waiting; her marriage to one eligible in rank and fortune was ready to be accomplished. At the altar this demoiselle, so meek and dutiful, turned upon me like a leopardess, charged me with cruelty and crimes, and broke, be-

fore the gaping priest, the troth I had plighted for her. I swore there and then by ten thousand devils that she should marry the first man we met after leaving the château, be he prince, charcoal burner or thief. You, shepherd, are the first. Mademoiselle must be wed this night. If not you, then another. You have ten minutes in which to make your decision. Do not vex me with words or questions. Ten minutes, shepherd; and they are speeding.”

The marquis drummed loudly with his white fingers upon the table. He sank into a veiled attitude of waiting. It was as if some great house had shut its doors and windows against approach. David would have spoken, but the huge man’s bearing stopped his tongue. Instead, he stood by the lady’s chair and bowed.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, and he marveled to find his words flowing easily before so much elegance and beauty, “you have heard me say I was a shepherd. I have also had the fancy, at times, that I am a poet. If it be the test of a poet to adore and cherish the beautiful, that fancy is now strengthened. Can I serve you in any way, mademoiselle?”

The young woman looked up at him with eyes dry and mournful. His frank, glowing face, made serious by the gravity of the adventure, his strong straight figure and the liquid sympathy in his blue eye, perhaps, also, her imminent need of long-denied help and kindness, thawed her to sudden tears.

“Monsieur,” she said, in low tones, “you look to be true and kind. He is my uncle, the brother of my father, and my only relative. He loved my mother, and he hates me because I am like her. He has made my life one long terror. I am afraid of his very looks, and never before dared to disobey him. But to-night he would have married me to a man three times my age. You will forgive me for bringing this vexation upon

you, monsieur. You will, of course, decline this mad act he tries to force upon you. But let me thank you for your generous words, at least. I have had none spoken to me in so long."

There was now something more than generosity in the poet's eye. Poet he must have been, for Yvonne was forgotten; this fine, new loveliness held him with its freshness and grace. The subtle perfume from her filled him with strange emotions. His tender look fell warmly upon her. She leaned to it, thirstily.

"Ten minutes," said David, "is given me in which to do what I would devote years to achieve. I will not say I pity you, mademoiselle; it would not be true—I love you. I cannot ask love from you yet, but let me rescue you from this cruel man, and, in time, love may come. I think I have a future; I will not always be a shepherd. For the present I will cherish you with all my heart and make your life less sad. Will you trust your fate to me, mademoiselle?"

"Ah, you would sacrifice yourself from pity!"

"From love. The time is almost up, mademoiselle."

"You will regret it, and despise me."

"I will live only to make you happy, and myself worthy of you."

Her fine, small hand crept into his from beneath her cloak.

"I will trust you," she breathed, "with my life. And—and love—may not be so far off as you think. Tell him. Once away from the power of his eyes I may forget."

David went and stood before the marquis. The black figure stirred, and the mocking eyes glanced at the great hall clock.

"Two minutes to spare. A shepherd requires eight minutes to decide whether he will accept a bride of beauty and income! Speak up, shepherd, do you consent to become mademoiselle's husband?"

"Mademoiselle," said David, standing proudly, "has done me the honor to yield to my request that she become my wife."

"Well said!" said the marquis. "You have yet the making of a courtier in you, master shepherd. Mademoiselle could have drawn a worse prize, after all. And now to be done with the affair as quick as the church and the devil will allow!"

He struck the table soundly with his sword hilt. The landlord came, knees shaking, bringing more candles in the hope of anticipating the great lord's whims.

"Fetch a priest," said the marquis; "a priest; do you understand? In ten minutes have a priest here, or I will——"

The landlord dropped his candles and flew.

The priest came, heavy-eyed and ruffled. He made David Mignot and Lucie de Varennes man and wife, pocketed a gold piece that the marquis tossed him, and shuffled out again into the night.

It was done!

"Wine," ordered the marquis, spreading his ominous fingers at the host.

"Fill glasses," he said, when it was brought. He stood up at the head of the table in the candlelight, a black mountain of venom and conceit, with something like the memory of an old love turned to poison in his eye, as it fell upon his niece.

"Monsieur Mignot," he said, raising his wineglass, "drink after I say this to you: You have taken to be your wife one who will make your life a foul and wretched thing. The blood in her is an inheritance running black lies and red ruin. She will bring you shame and anxiety. The devil that descended to her is there in her eyes and skin and mouth that stoop even to beguile a peasant. There is your promise, monsieur poet, for a happy life. Drink your

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wine. At last, mademoiselle, I am rid of you."

The marquis drank. A little grievous cry, as if from a sudden wound, came from the girl's lips. David, with his glass in his hand, stepped forward three paces and faced the marquis. There was little of a shepherd in his bearing.

"Just now," he said calmly, "you did me the honor to call me 'monsieur.' May I hope, therefore, that my marriage to mademoiselle has placed me somewhat nearer to you in—let us say, reflected rank—has given me the right to stand more as an equal to monseigneur in a certain little piece of business I have in my mind?"

"You may hope, shepherd," sneered the marquis.

"Then," said David, dashing his glass of wine into the contemptuous eyes that mocked him, "perhaps you will condescend to fight me."

The fury of the great lord outbroke in one sudden curse like a blast from a horn. He tore his sword from its black sheath; he called to the hovering landlord: "A sword there, for this lout!" He turned to the lady, with a laugh that chilled her heart, and said: "You put much labor upon me, madame. It seems I must find you a husband and make you a widow in the same night."

"I know not swordplay," said David. He flushed to make the confession before his lady.

"I know not swordplay," mimicked the marquis. "Shall we fight like peasants with oaken cudgels? *Hola!* Francois, my pistols!"

A postilion brought two shining great pistols ornamented with carved silver, from the carriage holsters. The marquis tossed one upon the table near David's hand. "To the other end of the table," he cried; "even a shepherd may pull a trigger. Few of them attain the honor to die by the weapon of a De Beaupertuys."

The shepherd and the marquis faced

each other from the ends of the long table. The landlord, in an agony of terror, clutched the air and stammered:

"M-M-Monseigneur, for the love of Christ! not in my house—do not spill blood—it will ruin my custom—"

The look of the marquis, threatening him, paralyzed his tongue.

"Coward," cried the lord of Beaupertuys, "cease chattering your teeth long enough to give the word for us, if you can."

Mine host's knees smote the floor. He was without a vocabulary. Even sounds were beyond him. Still, by gestures he seemed to beseech peace in the name of his house and custom.

"I will give the word," said the lady, in a clear voice. She went up to David and kissed him sweetly. Her eyes were sparkling bright, and color had come to her cheek. She stood against the wall, and the two men leveled their pistols for her count.

"*Un—deux—trois!*"

The two reports came so nearly together that the candles flickered but once. The marquis stood, smiling, the fingers of his left hand resting, outspread, upon the end of the table. David remained erect, and turned his head very slowly, searching for his wife with his eyes. Then, as a garment falls from where it is hung, he sank, crumpled, upon the floor.

With a little cry of terror and despair, the widowed maid ran and stooped above him. She found his wound, and then looked up with her old look of pale melancholy. "Through his heart," she whispered. "Oh, his heart!"

"Come," boomed the great voice of the marquis, "out with you to the carriage! Daybreak shall not find you on my hands. Wed you shall be again, and to a living husband, this night. The next we come upon, my lady, highwayman, or peasant. If the road yields no other, then the churl that opens my gates. Out with you to the carriage!"

The marquis, implacable and huge, the lady wrapped again in the mystery of her cloak, the postilion bearing the weapons—all moved out to the waiting carriage. The sound of its ponderous wheels rolling away echoed through the slumbering village. In the hall of the Silver Flagon the distracted landlord wrung his hands above the slain poet's body, while the flames of the four-and-twenty candles danced and flickered on the table.

THE RIGHT BRANCH.

Three leagues, then, the road ran, and turned into a puzzle. It joined with another and a larger road at right angles. David stood, uncertain, for a while, and then took the road to the right.

Whither it led he knew not, but he was resolved to leave Vernoy far behind that night. He traveled a league and then passed a large château which showed testimony of recent entertainment. Lights shone from every window; from the great stone gateway ran a tracery of wheel tracks drawn in the dust by the vehicles of the guests.

Three leagues farther and David was weary. He rested and slept for a while on a bed of pine boughs at the roadside. Then up and on again along the unknown way.

Thus for five days he traveled the great road, sleeping upon Nature's balsamic beds or in peasants' ricks, eating of their black, hospitable bread, drinking from streams or the willing cup of the goatherd.

At length he crossed a great bridge and set his foot within the smiling city that has crushed or crowned more poets than all the rest of the world. His breath came quickly as Paris sang to him in a little undertone her vital chant of greeting—the hum of voice and foot and wheel.

High up under the eaves of an old house in the Rue Conti, David paid for

lodging, and set himself, in a wooden chair, to his poems. The street, once sheltering citizens of import and consequence, was now given over to those who ever follow in the wake of decline.

The houses were tall and still possessed of a ruined dignity, but many of them were empty save for dust and the spider. By night there was the clash of steel and the cries of brawlers straying restlessly from inn to inn. Where once gentility abode was now but a rancid and rude incontinence. But here David found housing commensurate to his scant purse. Daylight and candlelight found him at pen and paper.

One afternoon he was returning from a foraging trip to the lower world, with bread and curds and a bottle of thin wine. Halfway up his dark stairway he met—or rather came upon, for she rested on the stair—a young woman of a beauty that should balk even the justice of a poet's imagination. A loose, light cloak, flung open, showed a rich gown beneath. Her eyes changed swiftly with every little shade of thought. Within one moment they would be round and artless like a child's, and long and cozening like a gypsy's. One hand raised her gown, undraping a little shoe, high-heeled, with its ribbons dangling, untied. So heavenly she was, so unfitted to stoop, so qualified to charm and command! Perhaps she had seen David coming, and had waited for his help there.

Ah, would monsieur pardon that she occupied the stairway, but the shoe!—the naughty shoe! Alas! it would not remain tied. Ah! if monsieur *would* be so gracious!

The poet's fingers trembled as he tied the contrary ribbon. Then he would have fled from the danger of her presence, but the eyes grew long and cozening, like a gypsy's, and held him. He leaned against the balustrade, clutching his bottle of sour wine.

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"You have been so good," she said, smiling. "Does monsieur, perhaps, live in the house?"

"Yes, madame. I—I think so, madame."

"Perhaps in the third story, then?"

"No, madame; higher up."

The lady fluttered her fingers with the least possible gesture of impatience.

"Pardon. Certainly I am not discreet in asking. Monsieur will forgive me? It is surely not becoming that I should inquire where he lodges."

"Madame, do not say so. I live in the——"

"No, no, no; do not tell me. Now I see that I erred. But I cannot lose the interest I feel in this house and all that is in it. Once it was my home. Often I come here but to dream of those happy days again. Will you let that be my excuse?"

"Let me tell you, then, for you need no excuse," stammered the poet. "I live on the top floor—the small room where the stairs turn."

"In the front room?" asked the lady, turning her head sidewise.

"The rear, madame."

The lady sighed, as if with relief.

"I will detain you no longer, then, monsieur," she said, employing the round and artless eye. "Take good care of my house. Alas! Only the memories of it are mine now. Adieu, and accept my thanks for your courtesy."

She was gone, leaving but a smile and a trace of sweet perfume. David climbed the stairs as one in slumber. But he awoke from it, and the smile and the perfume lingered with him and never afterward did either seem quite to leave him. This lady of whom he knew nothing drove him to lyrics of eyes, chansons of swiftly conceived love, odes to curling hair and sonnets to slippers on slender feet.

Poet he must have been, for Yvonne was forgotten; this fine, new loveliness held him with its freshness and grace.

The subtle perfume about her filled him with strange emotions.

On a certain night three persons were gathered about a table in a room on the third floor of the same house. Three chairs and the table and a lighted candle upon it was all the furniture. One of the persons was a huge man, dressed in black. His expression was one of sneering pride. The ends of his upturned mustache reached nearly to his mocking eyes. Another was a lady, young and beautiful, with eyes that could be round and artless, like a child's, or long and cozening, like a gypsy's, but were now keen and ambitious, like any other conspirator's. The third was a man of action, a combatant, a bold and impatient executive, breathing fire and steel. He was addressed by the others as Captain Desrolles.

This man struck the table with his fist, and said, with controlled violence:

"To-night. To-night as he goes to midnight mass. I am tired of the plotting that gets nowhere. I am sick of signals and ciphers and secret meetings and such *baragouin*. Let us be honest traitors. If France is to be rid of him, let us kill in the open, and not hunt with snares and traps. To-night, I say. I back my words. My hand will do the deed. To-night, as he goes to mass."

The lady turned upon him a cordial look. Woman, however wedded to plots, must ever thus bow to rash courage. The big man stroked his upturned mustache.

"Dear captain," he said, in a great voice, softened by habit, "this time I agree with you. Nothing is to be gained by waiting. Enough of the palace guards belong to us to make the endeavor a safe one."

"To-night," repeated Captain Desrolles, again striking the table. "You have heard me, marquis; my hand will do the deed."

"But now," said the huge man, softly,

"comes a question. Word must be sent to our partisans in the palace, and a signal agreed upon. Our staunchest men must accompany the royal carriage. At this hour what messenger can penetrate so far as the south doorway? Ribout is stationed there; once a message is placed in his hands all will go well."

"I will send the message," said the lady.

"You, countess?" said the marquis, raising his eyebrows. "Your devotion is great, we know, but——"

"Listen!" exclaimed the lady, rising and resting her hands upon the table; "in a garret of this house lives a youth from the provinces as guileless and tender as the lambs he tended there. I have met him twice or thrice upon the stairs. I questioned him, fearing that he might dwell too near the room in which we are accustomed to meet. He is mine, if I will. He writes poems in his garret, and I think he dreams of me. He will do what I say. He shall take the message to the palace."

The marquis rose from his chair and bowed. "You did not permit me to finish my sentence, countess," he said. "I would have said: 'Your devotion is great, but your wit and charm are infinitely greater.'"

While the conspirators were thus engaged, David was polishing some lines addressed to his *amorette d'escalier*. He heard a timorous knock at his door, and opened it, with a great throb, to behold her there, panting, as one in straits, with eyes wide open and artless, like a child's.

"Monsieur," she breathed, "I come to you in distress. I believe you to be good and true, and I know of no other help. How I flew through the streets among the swaggering men! Monsieur, my mother is dying. My uncle is a captain of guards in the palace of the king. Some one must fly to bring him. May I hope——"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted David,

his eyes shining with the desire to do her service, "your hopes shall be my wings. Tell me how I may reach him."

The lady thrust a sealed paper into his hand.

"Go to the south gate—the south gate, mind—and say to the guards there, 'The falcon has left his nest.' They will pass you, and you will go to the south entrance to the palace. Repeat the words, and give this letter to the man who will reply, 'Let him strike when he will.' This is the password, monsieur, intrusted to me by my uncle, for now when the country is disturbed and men plot against the king's life, no one without it can gain entrance to the palace grounds after nightfall. If you will, monsieur, take him this letter so that my mother may see him before she closes her eyes."

"Give it me," said David eagerly. "But shall I let you return home through the streets alone so late? I——"

"No, no—fly. Each moment is like a precious jewel. Some time," said the lady, with eyes long and cozening, like a gypsy's, "I will try to thank you for your goodness."

The poet thrust the letter into his breast, and bounded down the stairway. The lady, when he was gone, returned to the room below.

The eloquent eyebrows of the marquis interrogated her.

"He is gone," she said, "as fleet and stupid as one of his own sheep, to deliver it."

The table shook again from the batter of Captain Desrolles' fist.

"Sacred name!" he cried. "I have left my pistols behind! I can trust no others."

"Take this," said the marquis, drawing from beneath his cloak a shining, great weapon, ornamented with carven silver. "There are none truer. But guard it closely, for it bears my arms and crest, and already I am suspected. Me, I must put many leagues between

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myself and Paris this night. To-morrow must find me in my château. After you, dear countess."

The marquis puffed out the candle. The lady, well cloaked, and the two gentlemen softly descended the stairway and flowed into the crowd that roamed along the narrow pavements of the Rue Conti.

David sped. At the south gate of the king's residence a halberd was laid to his breast, but he turned its point with the words: "The falcon has left his nest."

"Pass, brother," said the guard, "and go quickly."

On the south steps of the palace they moved to seize him, but again the *mot de passe* charmed the watchers. One among them stepped forward and began: "Let him strike——" but a flurry among the guards told of a surprise. A man of keen look and soldierly stride suddenly pressed through them and seized the letter which David held in his hand. "Come with me," he said, and led him inside the great hall. Then he tore open the letter and read it. He beckoned to a man uniformed as an officer of musketeers, who was then passing.

"Captain Tetreau, you will have the guards at the south entrance and the south gate arrested and confined. Place men known to be loyal in their places." To David he said: "Come with me."

He conducted him through a corridor and an anteroom into a spacious chamber, where a melancholy man, somberly dressed, sat brooding in a great, leather-covered chair. To that man he said:

"Sire, I have told you that the palace is as full of traitors and spies as a sewer is of rats. You have thought, sire, that it was my fancy. This man penetrated to your very door by their connivance. He bore a letter which I have intercepted. I have brought him here that your majesty may no longer think my zeal excessive."

"I will question him," said the king, stirring in his chair. He looked at David with heavy eyes dulled by an opaque film. The poet bent his knee.

"From where do you come?" asked the king.

"From the village of Vernoy, in the province of Eure-et-Loir, sire," said David.

"What do you follow in Paris?"

"I—I would be a poet, sire."

"What did you in Vernoy?"

"I minded my father's flock of sheep."

The king stirred again, and the film lifted from his eyes.

"Ah! in the fields!"

"Yes, sire."

"You lived in the fields; you went out in the cool of the morning and lay among the hedges in the grass. The flock distributed themselves upon the hillside; you drank of the living stream; you ate your sweet, brown bread in the shade, and you listened, doubtless, to the blackbirds piping in the grove. Is not that so, shepherd?"

"It is, sire," answered David, with a sigh; "and to the bees at the flowers, and, maybe, to the grape gatherers singing on the hill."

"Yes, yes," said the king impatiently; "maybe to them; but surely to the blackbirds. They whistled often, in the grove, did they not?"

"Nowhere, sire, so sweetly as in Eure-et-Loir. I have endeavored to express their song in some verses that I have written."

"Can you repeat those verses?" asked the king eagerly. "A long time ago I listened to the blackbirds. It would be something better than a kingdom if one could rightly construe their song. And at night you drove the sheep to the fold and then sat, in peace and tranquillity, to your pleasant bread. Can you repeat those verses, shepherd?"

"They run this way, sire," said David, with respectful ardor:

"Lazy shepherd, see your lambkins
Skip, ecstatic, on the mead;
See the first dance in the breezes;
Hear Pan blowing at his reed.

"Hear us calling from the treetops,
See us swoop upon your flock;
Yield us wool to make our nests warm
In the branches of the——"

"If it please your majesty," interrupted a harsh voice, "I will ask a question or two of this rhymster. There is little time to spare. I crave pardon, sire, if my anxiety for your safety offends."

"The loyalty," said the king, "of the Duke D'Aumale is too well proven to give offense." He sank into his chair, and the film came again over his eyes.

"First," said the duke, "I will read you the letter he brought.

"To-night is the anniversary of the dauphin's death. If he goes, as is his custom, to midnight mass to pray for the soul of his son, the falcon will strike, at the corner of the Rue Esplanade. If this be his intention, set a red light in the upper room at the southwest corner of the palace, that the falcon may take heed."

"Peasant," said the duke sternly, "you have heard these words. Who gave you this message to bring?"

"My lord duke," said David sincerely, "I will tell you. A lady gave it me. She said her mother was ill, and that this writing would fetch her uncle to her bedside. I do not know the meaning of the letter, but I will swear that she is beautiful and good."

"Describe the woman," commanded the duke, "and how you came to be her dupe."

"Describe her!" said David, with a tender smile. "You would command words to perform miracles. Well, she is made of sunshine and deep shade. She is slender, like the alders, and moves with their grace. Her eyes change while you gaze into them; now round, and then half shut as the sun peeps between two clouds. When she

comes, heaven is all about her; when she leaves, there is chaos and a scent of hawthorne blossoms. She came to me in the Rue Conti, number twenty-nine."

"It is the house," said the duke, turning to the king, "that we have been watching. Thanks to the poet's tongue, we have a picture of the infamous Countess Quebedaux."

"Sire and my lord duke," said David earnestly, "I hope my poor words have done no injustice. I have looked into that lady's eyes. I will stake my life that she is angel, letter or no letter."

The duke looked at him steadily. "I will put you to the proof," he said, slowly. "Dressed as the king, you shall, yourself, attend mass in his carriage at midnight. Do you accept the test?"

David smiled. "I have looked into her eyes," he said. "I had my proof there. Take yours how you will."

Half an hour before twelve the Duke D'Aumale, with his own hands, set a red lamp in a southwest window of the palace. At ten minutes to the hour, David, leaning on his arm, dressed as the king, from top to toe, with his head bowed in his cloak, walked slowly from the royal apartments to the waiting carriage. The duke assisted him inside, and closed the door. The carriage whirled away along its route to the cathedral.

On the *qui vive* in a house at the corner of the Rue Esplanade was Captain Tetreau with twenty men, ready to pounce upon the conspirators when they should appear.

But it seemed that, for some reason, the plotters had slightly altered their plans. When the royal carriage had reached the Rue Christopher, one square nearer than the Rue Esplanade, forth from it burst Captain Desrolles, with his band of would-be regicides, and assailed the equipage. The guards upon the carriage, though surprised at the premature attack, descended and fought valiantly. The noise of conflict

attracted the force of Captain Tetreau, and they came pelting down the street to the rescue. But, in the meantime, the desperate Desrolles had torn open the door of the king's carriage, thrust his weapon against the body of the dark figure inside, and fired.

Now, with loyal reinforcements at hand, the street rang with cries and the rasp of steel, but the frightened horses had dashed away. Upon the cushions lay the dead body of the poor mock king and poet, slain by a ball from the pistol of Monseigneur, the Marquis de Beaupertuys.

THE MAIN ROAD.

Three leagues, then, the road ran, and turned into a puzzle. It joined with another and a longer road at right angles. David, stood, uncertain for a while, and then sat himself to rest upon its side.

Whither those roads led he knew not. Either way there seemed to lie a great world full of chance and peril. And then, lying there, his eye fell upon a bright star, one that he and Yvonne had named for theirs. That set him thinking of Yvonne, and he wondered if he had not been too hasty. Why should he leave her and his home because a few hot words had come between them? Was love so brittle a thing that jealousy, the very proof of it, could break it? Mornings always brought a cure for the little heartaches of evening. There was yet time for him to return home without any one in the sweetly sleeping village of Vernoy being the wiser. His heart was Yvonne's; there where he had lived always he could write his poems and find his happiness.

David rose, and shook off his unrest and the wild mood that had tempted him. He set his face steadfastly back along the road he had come. By the time he had retraveled the road to Vernoy, his desire to rove was gone. He

passed the sheepfold, and the sheep scurried, with a drumming flutter, at his late footsteps, warming his heart by the homely sound. He crept without noise into his little room and lay there, thankful that his feet had escaped the distress of new roads that night.

How well he knew woman's heart! The next evening Yvonne was at the well in the road where the young congregated in order that the curé might have business. The corner of her eye was engaged in a search for David, albeit her set mouth seemed unrelenting. He saw the look; braved the mouth; drew from it a recantation, and, later, a kiss as they walked homeward together.

Three months afterward they were married. David's father was shrewd and prosperous. He gave them a wedding that was heard of three leagues away. Both the young people were favorites in the village. There was a procession in the streets, a dance on the green; they had the marionettes and a tumbler out from Dreux to delight the guests.

Then a year, and David's father died. The sheep and the cottage descended to him. He already had the seemliest wife in the village. Yvonne's milk pails and her brass kettles were bright—*ouf!* they blinded you in the sun when you passed that way. But you must keep your eyes upon her yard, for her flower beds were so neat and gay they restored to you your sight. And you might hear her sing, aye, as far as the double chestnut tree above Père Gruneau's blacksmith forge.

But a day came when David drew out paper from a long-shut drawer, and began to bite the end of a pencil. Spring had come again and touched his heart. Poet he must have been, for now Yvonne was well-nigh forgotten. This fine new loveliness of earth held him with its witchery and grace. The perfume from her woods and meadows

stirred him strangely. Daily had he gone forth with his flock, and brought it safe at night. But now he stretched himself under the hedge and pieced words together on his bits of paper. The sheep strayed, and the wolves, perceiving that difficult poems make easy mutton, ventured from the woods and stole his lambs.

David's stock of poems grew larger and his flock smaller. Yvonne's nose and temper waxed sharp and her talk blunt. Her pans and kettles grew dull, but her eyes had caught their flash. She pointed out to the poet that his neglect was reducing the flock and bringing woe upon the household. David hired a boy to guard the sheep, locked himself in the little room in the top of the cottage, and wrote more poems. The boy, being a poet by nature, but not furnished with an outlet in the way of writing, spent his time in slumber. The wolves lost no time in discovering that poetry and sleep are practically the same; so the flock steadily grew smaller. Yvonne's ill temper increased at an equal rate. Sometimes she would stand in the yard and rail at David through his high window. Then you could hear her as far as the double chestnut tree above Père Gruneau's blacksmith forge.

M. Papineau, the kind, wise, meddling old notary, saw this, as he saw everything at which his nose pointed. He went to David, fortified himself with a great pinch of snuff, and said:

"Friend Mignot, I affixed the seal upon the marriage certificate of your father. It would distress me to be obliged to attest a paper signifying the bankruptcy of his son. But that is what you are coming to. I speak as an old friend. Now, listen to what I have to say. You have your heart set, I perceive, upon poetry. At Dreux, I have a friend, one Monsieur Bril—Georges Bril. He lives in a little cleared space in a houseful of books. He is a learned man; he visits Paris each year; he him-

self has written books. He will tell you when the catacombs were made, how they found out the names of the stars, and why the plover has a long bill. The meaning and the form of poetry is to him as intelligent as the baa of a sheep is to you. I will give you a letter to him, and you shall take him your poems and let him read them. Then you will know if you shall write more, or give your attention to your wife and business."

"Write the letter," said David; "I am sorry you did not speak of this sooner."

At sunrise the next morning he was on the road to Dreux with the precious roll of poems under his arm. At noon he wiped the dust from his feet at the door of Monsieur Bril. That learned man broke the seal of M. Papineau's letter, and sucked up its contents through his gleaming spectacles as the sun draws water. He took David inside to his study and sat him down upon a little island beat upon by a sea of books.

Monsieur Bril had a conscience. He flinched not even at a mass of manuscript the thickness of a finger length and rolled to an incorrigible curve. He broke the back of the roll against his knee, and began to read. He slighted nothing; he bored into the lump as a worm into a nut, seeking for a kernel.

Meanwhile, David sat, marooned, trembling in the spray of so much literature. It roared in his ears. He held no chart or compass for voyaging in that sea. Half the world, he thought, must be writing books.

Monsieur Bril bored to the last page of the poems. Then he took off his spectacles and wiped them with his handkerchief.

"My old friend, Papineau, is well?" he asked.

"In the best of health," said David.

"How many sheep have you, Monsieur Mignot?"

"Three hundred and nine, when I counted them yesterday. The flock has had ill fortune. To that number it has

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"You have a wife and a home, and lived in comfort. The sheep brought you plenty. You went into the fields with them and lived in the keen air and ate the sweet bread of contentment. You had but to be vigilant and recline there upon nature's breast, listening to the whistle of the blackbirds in the grove. Am I right thus far?"

"It was so," said David.

"I have read all your verses," continued Monsieur Bril, his eyes wandering about his sea of books as if he conned the horizon for a sail. "Look yonder, through that window, Monsieur Mignot; tell me what you see in that tree."

"I see a crow," said David, looking.

"There is a bird," said Monsieur Bril, "that shall assist me where I am disposed to shirk a duty. You know that bird, Monsieur Mignot; he is the philosopher of the air. He is happy through submission to his lot. None so merry or full-crawed as he with his whimsical eye and rollicking step. The fields yield him what he desires. He never grieves that his plumage is not gay, like the oriole's. And you have heard, Monsieur Mignot, the notes that nature has given him. Is the nightingale any happier, do you think?"

David rose to his feet. The crow cawed harshly from his tree.

"I thank you, Monsieur Bril," he said slowly. "There was not, then, one nightingale note among all those croaks?"

"I could not have missed it," said Monsieur Bril, with a sigh. "I read every word. Live your poetry, man; do not try to write it any more."

"I thank you," said David, again. "And now I will be going back to my sheep."

"If you would dine with me," said the man of books, "and overlook the smart of it, I will give you reasons."

"No," said the poet, "I must be back in the fields cawing at my sheep."

Back along the road to Vernoy he trudged, with his poems under his arm. When he reached his village he turned into the shop of one Zeigler, a Jew out of Armenia, who sold anything that came to his hand.

"Friend," said David, "wolves from the forest harass my sheep on the hills. I must purchase firearms to protect them. What have you?"

"A bad day, this, for me, friend Mignot," said Zeigler, spreading his hands, "for I perceive that I must sell you a weapon that will not fetch a tenth of its value. Only last week I bought from a peddler a wagon full of goods that he procured at a sale by a commissionaire of the crown. The sale was of the château and belongings of a great lord—I know not his title—who has been banished for conspiracy against the king. There are some choice firearms in the lot. This pistol—oh, a weapon fit for a prince!—it shall be only forty francs to you, friend Mignot—if I lose ten by the sale. But perhaps an arquebus—"

"This will do," said David, throwing the money on the counter. "Is it charged?"

"I will charge it," said Zeigler. "And, for ten francs more, add a store of powder and ball."

David laid his pistol under his coat and walked to his cottage. Yvonne was not there. Of late she had taken to gadding much among the neighbors. But a fire was glowing in the kitchen stove. David opened the door of it and thrust his poems in upon the coals. As they blazed up they made a singing, harsh sound in the flue.

"The song of the crow!" said the poet.

He went up to his attic room and closed the door. So quiet was the village that a score of people heard the roar of the great pistol. They flocked thither,

and up the stairs where the smoke, issuing, drew their notice.

The men laid the body of the poet upon his bed, awkwardly arranging it to conceal the torn plumage of the poor black crow. The women chattered in a luxury of zealous pity. Some of them ran to tell Yvonne.

M. Papineau, whose nose had brought him there among the first, picked up the weapon and ran his eye over its silver mountings with a mingled air of connoisseurship and grief.

"The arms," he explained, aside, to the *curé*, "and crest of Monseigneur, the Marquis de Beaupertuys."



THE GREEN DAWN

NOT like an evergreen, whose somber shade
 Alters neither for summer noon nor ice,
 But faces, imperturbable, the blade
 Of autumn, or spring's passionate Paradise,
 I yield my leafage to the rummaging storm,
 I loose my little lives to the snow's chill;
 And when summoning April shouts its warm
 Greeting, I flame like green dawn over the hill.

And my chameleon heart will lift its hue
 To yours, O soil on which my soul is fed,
 Although you veer from dawn red and noon blue
 To midnight blankness. So be comforted,
 For our two hearts will mate like glowing birds
 In more than the sweet blossoming of words.

CLEMENT WOOD.

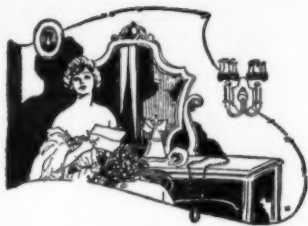


THIS DAY

THIS day is much too blue in sky and lake
 To ruminate on smothering in the grave;
 If I were lying low to-day, I'd break
 The ceremonies, and rise to breathe the brave
 September air; I'd drink the liquid sun,
 And lend my body like a slim, white sail
 To catch the sallies of the wind, and run
 Swifter than any salt, southwestern gale.

But since I walk this merry earth instead
 Of lying underneath the seeping rain,
 I will be thrice alive and most undead,
 Nor think an eon hence I will have lain
 Ten thousand thousand decades unawake,
 Insensible to wind and sky and lake.

VIRGINIA MOORE.



Fer-de-lance

By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "The God of Gentlemen,"
"The Breath of Life," etc.

IT was, I think, on that spectacular night when we left Port of Spain astern of us under a sky amazingly spangled with stars, that the truth about Zimbal became apparent. The man was intolerable. Perhaps—looking back upon it all—he wasn't more than ordinarily obnoxious on that particular evening; yet he managed, in some very definite manner, to fray our nerves pretty near to the breaking point.

We were heading almost due north, over a sea like dark glass, toward Martinique. We wanted, you can understand, to be rather quiet; to surrender ourselves, body and soul, to the warm, seductive wonder of that tropical night. We wanted, smoking our cigars, to be permitted to linger without interruption over our personal memories, and—possibly—to weave, each of us, our own fanciful and intimate little dreams. A mood unspoken yet surely mutual; not to be lightly cast aside. And Zimbal must proceed to destroy all of this by his eternal blatancy, his arrant and aggressive egotism.

We had endured twenty-six days of him; twenty-six days cooped up in Martyn's forty-footer. Down the icy, wind-swept trail round Hatteras to Cuba; across the molten mirror of the Caribbean to the pink and crumbling harbor cities of the Spanish Main; then eastward, bucking an insistent trade wind, like the breath of a furnace, along the somber, mountainous coast of Venezuela. And so, eventually, to Trinidad, to Port of Spain.

Rodson, edging his chair slightly

nearer to mine, as the last of the harbor lights dropped below the horizon, nodded toward Zimbal's huge, white bulk leaning against the taffrail. In a vicious whisper he demanded why in hades Martyn had brought the fellow along. What, anyway, had been Martyn's precise idea in extending him the invitation? He wasn't our kind. He wasn't even a good sportsman. I suggested mildly that Martyn had perhaps hoped he'd be a constant source of entertainment to us. Also, I reminded him that back in New York there were no end of playwrights, editors, critics—men and women fairly high up in that line of thing—who fed him nightly, and elaborately, in order to hear his pungent comments on our altogether imperfect state of civilization.

"Dinners," Rodson murmured. "Yes, I can see that. But here, on Martyn's boat—it's the last place in the world for him. Why, did you see him this morning with his rod, in the dory? He made a fearful mess of the whole job—lost nearly half his fish."

That was true. Through Rodson's English eyes Zimbal was an unforgivably bad sportsman—in both senses of the word. I can see him now, his big and powerful body in white ducks that were always a trifle too clean, a trifle too well-pressed, lounging in his canvas chair under the single strip of awning aft, while we—the rest of us—sweltered and cursed and blistered our hands, helping Martyn with some stubborn and complicated piece of nautical tackle. It never, I suppose, occurred to Zimbal to

offer his assistance, and certainly none of us demanded it. Our pride grew, as time went on and we began to realize his exact attitude. And so he continued to sit in the one shady spot which the deck afforded, to smoke his large cigars, to read his highly improper foreign novels, to air his corrosive views—the accomplished and graceful loafer—the privileged passenger who was honoring us with his presence on this foolish little Caribbean adventure.

To-night Zimbal had, as usual, appeared in fresh ducks. The only one of us, Rodson observed, who could spare the time for such luxury. Being English, Rodson would have given a good deal to be able to change at sundown, but, you see, he'd been working right up to supper time with Martyn, on a broken rudder chain. Rodson had never learned the art of shirking.

Presently Zimbal left the taffrail, came noiselessly down the deck on his thick, rubber soles, and slipped into a chair beside us.

"And so," he said in his deep voice, "we're bound for Martinique." He took his cigar from his mouth, exhaled a cloud of blue smoke swiftly, his pale and mobile lips forming an enormous O. "Let's see! Historically, there was Josephine. And Mont Pélée. Yes, I suppose it's interesting, but full of damn' niggers, like the rest of these islands. The West Indies are all right, if you don't go ashore."

Martyn passed by at that moment, his lean, brown face wearing its usual preoccupied expression. He was carrying some kind of tackle. The busiest man imaginable; always going somewhere with something. Hearing Zimbal, he halted; took his stand before us, his long legs in their grease-stained ducks planted wide apart. His white-cotton singlet, buttonless, revealed a triangle of leather-colored chest. A man!

"Zimbal received some New York mail this morning," he informed us,

grinning. "And he's upset. He's missed at least a half dozen first nights, and Heaven knows how many motion picture premières. It must hurt, to have your pet private columns in the dailies and weeklies usurped by some mere upstart. He wonders how they can get along without him. Besides, Selma Zander makes her Manhattan début this week, doesn't she—eh, Zimbal?" His eyes twinkled.

"Now *there's* a woman," Zimbal said. He looked at each of us in turn, his lower lip protruding slightly, as if he half expected a challenge. He frequently injected that antagonistic note into his statements—just why, we couldn't make out. Perhaps in his own immediate circle at home they regarded contradiction as the essence of intellectual exercise. "Now *there's* a woman. Russian. She's alive. Compare our home-grown talent with the flame of her genius. Bah!" He snapped his fingers.

"And," he added with a smile, "she owes not a little of her success to me. We were friends, you see, for a long time."

The statement would have passed, I believe, but for something in his smile. Something intangible but wholly repellent. Rodson, uttering a short, sharp little sound of disgust, left his chair and strode away down the deck. Martyn followed him.

Although the rebuke had been obvious, undeniable, I must say that he did not appear to be greatly perturbed. I remember him glancing critically at his large, white hands, his pointed finger nails; and proceeding, for a moment or two, to employ a diminutive silver file. After that he took up a book, a thin volume of Baudelaire curiously bound in chintz, and began to read.

And while he read I attempted, studying him, to comprehend something of the man. He wasn't, of course, understandable in the straightforward way that men like Martyn, or Rodson, were

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understandable. He was—well, Oriental, if one may use the term without a geographic significance. Racially, I should say he was a Nordic. His head was massive, sparsely covered with straight, flaxen hair. His eyes were a pale, unpleasing shade of blue. It was his mouth, I decided, that put you on your guard against him. Those almost colorless, mobile lips with their infinite capacity for expression.

He was clever. No doubt of that. I could recall, time and again, articles written by him in the liberal type of periodical, attacking what he pleased to call the English-thinking Tradition. That seemed to be his specialty—when he wasn't tearing to pieces some theatrical production because it had attained a certain popularity with the public; or when he wasn't log-rolling for the latest Freudian novelist. His articles made you feel that we—the English-thinking ones—were of no possible import in the world's future. We were sentimental, narrow, effete. And yet, strange to say, he had little use for Europe. He had, during his youth, spent a considerable number of years in the theatrical worlds of London, Paris, and Vienna, but now—since the war—art had slumped to such an unspeakably low level in these metropoli that he preferred to ignore them. He liked incomprehensible poetry, and the stark ugliness of the younger Middle-westerners. He liked to discover queer, daring little plays by pessimists in Milan and Moscow, to translate these, and to have them printed in limited editions bound in Bakst covers. However, he was a success. In our native lingo, he got away with it beautifully. He was, in fact, the most successful cynic in New York, at a time when that profession was badly overcrowded.

It was just before we turned in that night, I remember, that the amazing, the astonishing thing happened; that I succeeded, quite involuntarily, in pro-

foundly disturbing him. Actually, he lost his careful poise, the suave, slightly insolent calm that we had come to regard as part of him. Unwarily I stumbled upon something—something rather vital, I imagine, in his past.

We had been talking about Martinique; about Lafcadio Hearn; about Saint Pierre's tragic end, and the former glory of France's West Indian empire. And, during that conversation, I happened to ask him, casually:

"Do you remember, when you were in Paris just before the war, an attractive young actress by the name of—let me see—Maury? Yes. That was it. Régine Maury."

"What about her?"

He fairly fired the words at me. And, at the same moment, his book slipped from his hands, fell to the deck.

"I happened to recall," I told him, "that she came, originally, from the French West Indies—and I think it was from Martinique. She had a brief but glorious career. And then there was some story about her. She disappeared altogether from Paris."

"So she did."

He glanced at me; and in that glance, swift as it was, I'm sure I detected—just a flicker of fear. He lighted a cigar, and the flame of the match wavered. Then, crossing his legs:

"Well, what was the scandal? Paris is usually full of that."

And so I told him what I remembered about Régine Maury.

"She'd made a big hit on her first appearance at the Minerva. Tremendous. Some people said that she was slated for the Comédie Française—at twenty-one, mind you. She became engaged to a member of the cabinet, a fine man, loved by every one. He worshiped her. And then—crash! An article appeared in a scurvy little newspaper full of insinuations. Oh, the worst imaginable things. Malice, of course. But she couldn't clear herself. And no one ever

traced who wrote it. The thing slipped by some weary editor's hands. Anyway, the public faith in her had gone—at least the faith of that decent element in the public to whom her art particularly appealed. So she went away."

"You can never get to the bottom of that kind of thing," Zimbal remarked. "She might even have been guilty. Who knows?"

"One had only to look at her," I suggested softly.

"Sentimentalist!" He laughed. Then rose, stretching his great arms above his head. "How about turning in? It's after twelve."

His poise, his equanimity had returned—to such a degree that I found myself wondering whether he'd ever, even momentarily, lost it; whether I hadn't imagined an uneasiness about him which had never existed.

About four in the afternoon, three days later, we dropped anchor off Martinique. We were, I think, a trifle taken aback by the sudden, startling beauty of it all; by the palm-fringed, emerald sweep of the shore; the steeply-gabled and definitely French houses, washed in pastel tints of pink and yellow and violet, huddled about a single church spire; and by the cruel splendor of those volcanic peaks cutting into a sky that was as blue as cobalt. There was, to me, a suggestion of unreality about the whole scene. It possessed the vividness of that rare kind of dream which is more vivid than life itself. And it wasn't until the health officer came alongside of us in his cutter and saluted Martyn with a grave and ceremonious bow—a wide sweep of his helmet engagingly different from Trinidad's businesslike, British salute—that I realized we were, actually, in French territory.

A trio of clumsy dugouts approached us, pitching in the frothy wake of the official launch, and, in one of these, an almost naked negro boy stood up, his

black body silhouetted sharply against the sky, proffering us some object that glittered in the sunshine.

Zimbal, leaning over the taffrail, first guessed what it was. He threw the boy a silver coin, and a moment later delightedly hauled the bottle aboard by means of a piece of string.

"Champagne! I no longer doubt that we are in France, in spite of those weird mountains. Even in their colonies the French, apparently, hold the lighter side of life the more important."

"And yet," I reminded him, "when they have a purpose in view they can be the most serious, most determined people in the whole universe."

"No doubt. No doubt." He dismissed the remark airily; proceeded to uncork his prize, and to sip it with a critical appreciation.

By five o'clock he and I were ashore. Martyn and Rodson remained aboard, their entire interest centered—as usual—in their beloved boat. Already Martyn had set our sailing hour for midnight. Nothing, I imagined—not even the most entrancing ports of the world—could arouse within him that sheer joy which came with a strong wind and an open sea, a craft that responded enthusiastically to the merest touch of his thin, brown hands.

Ashore we found our way to the center of the town, to a spacious green savanna, where, sheltered by tall cabbage palms, we came abruptly upon the marble gracefulness of Josephine, her eyes turned wistfully toward the harbor.

"She must have been happy here," Zimbal mused. "But that happiness ceased in France, in spite of the glory. Ambition! How often it spells an ultimate downfall. What was the name of that little lady, that actress from this very place, you mentioned last night? She, too, suffered."

His tone was altogether too careless, too casual.

"You know her name as well as I do," I told him.

I remember that he laughed, and that his laugh irritated me.

"Moreover," I went on, "I believe you know a great deal more about her than you pretend to know."

His eyes were suddenly narrowed—dangerous.

"Do you think," he asked, in a tone surprisingly mild, "that it is wise to go upon rash assumptions? Is it—advisable?"

A threat, you see, but carefully veiled. It didn't succeed in disturbing me particularly, although it did pique my curiosity. I considered that I had seen the man in an altogether new light. He had, so to speak, revealed himself. It was confoundingly interesting.

We left the statue of Josephine, turned into the narrow streets of the town. It was a gay, a sunny little place, that Fort-de-France. There were bazaars under striped awnings; there were cafés with marble-topped tables huddled together upon the narrow sidewalks; and there were even blue-and-white enameled signs at the street corners that brought you back to Paris itself. It happened to be a Sunday, but a Sunday totally different from the shuttered, dusty melancholy of your British sabbath at Port of Spain. Here, even the negresses, the portresses, miraculously carrying fruit-laden baskets upon their heads, wore their bandanna kerchiefs with a pretty grace, a flare to the bow that was the very essence of France.

A superb bronze girl, bare-footed, padded past us with a slow swing of her lips, and as she went by she lifted, briefly, dark, smoldering eyes. Zimbal paused; stared after her. Then, with a characteristic jerk of his head, he continued on his way.

"They're all the same—at heart," he muttered. "Age, or color, or nationality—those things don't count." He

whacked his heavy cane violently against a stone wall, frightening away a somnolent and blinking cat. "I've been lucky with 'em. I've never married."

I didn't encourage him. In fact, I tried to change the subject. Under the plea of a sheer, cold logic he held, I knew, the most outrageous views concerning the other sex.

We came, presently, to the outskirts of the town. The narrow plaster houses gave way to dilapidated wooden huts, to negro shanties thatched with straw. Ahead of us the road, glaring white, commenced the labored ascent of a steep hill.

"The trouble with you," Zimbal continued, "is that—like all your kind—you think you understand women, even remotely. And you know nothing whatever about them, for the simple, very foolish reason that you see them through a haze of sentiment. The instant you admire a woman you mentally put wings on her and bedeck her with flowers. That's why so many of your type marry young and unhappily. Love——"

He halted abruptly, raised his cane in a great, sweeping arc above his head, and began to slash ferociously at something that appeared to me like a small cloud of dust at his feet. Twice, three times, he raised his stick and brought it down upon that tiny, whirling, white commotion in the road. The whole business was over in a moment. I looked down and saw, impaled on his cane, a rather small and unimpressive yellow snake covered with a fine powder of dust.

"Fer-de-lance!" He stared at it. He appeared shaken. Pale. "Gad! I didn't even know they existed nowadays. Probably the most poisonous reptile known." He shook the thing free of his stick; sent it hurtling into a clump of palmettos at the side of the road. And then he looked at me—and laughed.

"There's a definition of love for you, my friend," he said. "A bite from a

fer-de-lance. That's just about it. You let it enter your system, and—in a flash—you're powerless. Done for! I've been inoculated by that slow process known as experience."

"If you take that attitude," I retorted, "I suppose it's bound to make you immune in the end. But why seek immunity?"

He patted my shoulder.

"Youth!" he said. He could be damnably patronizing at times. "Ideals! Illusions!" His lips curved into an expression of disgust. "Pah! Why can't we have a world full of men?"

He was at the moment incomprehensible, finely wrought up over some matter, some problem, revolving within his own mind. So much I knew, but no more than that. If he had had a conscience, I would have surmised that it was annoying him. But then, as we all knew, he didn't possess such a thing.

We had, by now, reached the summit of the hill. Above us, to the north, we could see the two Pitons, those outlandish twin mountains shaped like loaves of sugar, their reseda heights rising sheerly from an upland plain of emerald green. Below us the clustered roofs of Fort-de-France and, beyond them, the gentian sweep of the sea, with a horizon as bright as polished silver.

We strolled on; came eventually to a straggling and impoverished native village. And here, under a gigantic silk-cotton tree whose dark and glossy foliage created a fretwork of sun and shadow upon the white surface of the road, we discovered an ancient, two-story house—an apology for an inn—with an agreeably shaded veranda and green-shuttered windows. A faded sign in French hung upon rusty hooks above the mosquito-screened doorway: "Lunches — Dinners — Wines." There was, in spite of its dilapidation, its cobwebbed state of decay, an essential dignity about the place. It had, you felt sure, formed a bright thread in the pat-

tern of the past. It had been of importance; spoken about. You imagined, readily enough, the high-wheeled conveyance of prosperous French planters and their elaborately-dressed wives rolling up to that veranda, to pause briefly on their dusty way to the gay and charming city of Saint Pierre.

An old woman in pink gingham, whose wrinkled features were the color and texture of a walnut, appeared in the doorway to welcome us in a polite yet despondent manner. Her French, I recall even now, had a singular purity, and she expressed herself with a naïveté that was childish, and somehow medieval. She led us into a bare and forlorn dining room, its walls adorned with the faded advertisements of mineral waters and steamship lines.

We had there a light meal—coffee, eggs, and bread of a coarse, mealy variety. Zimbal, I knew, was disappointed. But the view from the window beside our table—overlooking the sea—was magnificent. And that was how we came to notice, about halfway down to the blue curve of the sea, a certain impressively large white house set square in the middle of a waving field of sugar cane.

"A lady lives there," the old woman informed us. Throughout the meal she had been hovering nervously behind our chairs. "A fine, good lady lives there all alone. She is much loved by us, here, in the village. And at the New Year she always sends each of us a gift."

She grinned toothlessly; nodded her tiny head several times.

"Yes, messieurs, she came here several years ago and purchased that great house. Once it was a fine estate—when I was a little girl." She emitted a hoarse cackle. "The lady now manages to make a small profit from the sugar, I believe, but nothing in Martinique is the same as it was before Saint Pierre was destroyed."

"A Frenchwoman?" Zimbal asked

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suddenly. I don't think he'd really been paying any attention to her up till then.

"A Frenchwoman, monsieur. Some say, though, that she was born here in Martinique. The family name used to be known. They were people of importance, the Maurys."

Of course I looked, instantly, at Zimbal. But, except for the fact that the grip of his hand—his right hand—tightened upon the edge of the table, he didn't outwardly betray any excitement, any interest, in the old woman's statement. And then he looked at me, and nodded in a curious, triumphant kind of way.

"She lives all alone but for her servants. She is quiet. She reads many books," the old woman droned on. "Moreover, she is beautiful to look upon. It seems sad that she wastes herself."

Zimbal pushed back his chair; began to pace slowly up and down the room. His head was bent, his hands clasped behind his back. A slight frown appeared upon his usually unruffled brow.

"She is quiet, and reads, and is beautiful," he repeated gently. "Yes. She would be—precisely like that."

With a sudden, decisive movement he picked up his hat, his Malacca cane.

"Come!" he said. "We will go and pay our respects to her."

Then and there I determined to take my stand. I don't know what, exactly, prompted my opposition. But I felt that the whole idea was preposterous, in bad taste—perhaps even worse than bad taste. A man, you know, hates to admit that he's a victim of intuition, which he regards as a peculiarly feminine mental process. Nevertheless, I held a growing conviction that, little as I knew about the whole matter, Zimbal shouldn't be permitted to stroll in his arrogant, complacent way down to that isolated house in the cane field; shouldn't be permitted to break in upon a carefully sought seclusion that must be apparent even to the merest passerby like myself.

"We're going back to the boat—now," I told him. "Martyn will be expecting us. He's sailing at midnight."

"Oh-ho!" he said, looking down at me and laughing his deep, irritating laugh. I confess that I felt suddenly rather small and excited and ridiculous, standing there before him. "Oh-ho! And why shouldn't I look up this lady, if I choose to? What's it to you?"

Then, I believe, I lost my temper with him.

"Can't you leave any one alone?" I asked him desperately. "Must you always be ferreting, ferreting into people's lives—into their very minds, their most private thoughts, for the sake of satisfying your own curiosity? Can't you see that this woman has come here to escape from the world and whatever it did to her?"

He didn't reply; merely put on his hat, paid the bill, and left the inn. Outside, in the warm, late sunshine, he paused to take out a cigarette case, an elaborate thing of chased gold, and to extract therefrom a monogrammed, gold-tipped cigarette.

"Perhaps," he admitted, as the blue smoke curled from his nostrils, "you are, after all, right. Out of the mouths of babes—"

And then, abruptly, he seized my arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "Look!"

I can see her now, as if it had been only yesterday, coming toward us on that glaring, dusty road. She was not, I imagine, aware of us. She was walking slowly, extremely slowly, her mood pensive. She was dressed simply enough in white, and she carried a white sunshade. She was slender; and, although not so very tall, she gave an immediate impression of quiet dignity. Under the soft, wide brim of her Panama, as she approached us, I could see dark hair rippling over her temples, framing a pair of eyes which, once you had looked at them, were not to be dismissed casually. They were eyes that held their full

measure of sadness; eyes that had blue-black shadows beneath them.

I will grant Zimbal this much—he didn't hesitate. He went toward her swiftly, confidently, with that great, springy stride of his; and I remember now—vividly—his sparse, flaxen hair ruffling in the slight breeze as he stood bareheaded, bowing before her.

"So," he said, "here at last is your hiding place, while all Paris misses you and wonders about you."

Actually, that was his greeting. For the barest perceptible instant a distinct expression of alarm hovered over her features. But this was quickly gone. She offered him her hand; said, with a faintly mocking smile:

"Paris and I, you know, are no longer friends."

"You remember me?" he asked her eagerly, in French.

She nodded.

"Of course!"

That was all. She didn't proceed to ask him any questions—where he'd come from; how he happened to be strolling casually through that outlandish little tropical village on that February afternoon. This, I think, disconcerted him at first, but when she made a movement to continue on her way he was at once at her side, in the most natural manner imaginable, introducing me, chatting gayly of our trip, our absurd little adventures. And so, when she turned down a narrow lane between two fields of tall, ripe sugar cane, he at her side, there was nothing for me to do but go with them.

Zimbal supplied most of the conversation. I saw that I need have no worry upon that score. Nevertheless, I felt that there was something vaguely disturbing about the whole situation. Her attitude, I think, was the cause. That, I remember, was the most striking feature about her—the tremendous, complete sense of detachment she conveyed, walking there between the two of

us. It was as if she had, ages ago, surrendered herself to some unfathomable philosophy, perhaps of her own making; as if outside matters, mere human beings, odds and ends such as Zimbal and myself, were of no account. It wasn't rudeness, mind you. Nothing as obvious, as personal, as commonplace as that. She listened to Zimbal politely enough—even laughed at some of his remarks; but that strange remoteness of spirit kept her—oh, miles and miles away from us, and it remained most carefully preserved.

We at length reached the end of the lane; passed through a gate into a formal little garden; a place of narrow, pebbly paths bordered with cactus; of hedges bright with sky-blue plumbago and delicate, pink coralita. Once, through an archway of bamboo, we caught a glimpse of a fountain, and an ivory wall splashed by a wine-colored cascade of buginwillæa.

"You will probably want to rest a while," Régine Maury said, indicating a group of wicker chairs as we approached a wide and shady veranda. And then, at Zimbal's swift expression of pleasure, she added: "I'm afraid, though, that I must leave you at present to yourselves. There are—things to be done about the house, so I must beg you to excuse me. I will send the maid out with something cool to drink."

As soon as she had passed through a screened doorway into the house I suggested that, if we didn't leave very soon, we would be stamped as intruders. He looked at me in mild surprise, as if aware of my presence for the first time.

"Oh!" he said. "You——" Then a pause, a wave of his hand in the direction of the doorway. "She has, just as I remembered, a great deal of charm. A rare personality. Don't you agree, my immovable young friend?"

I did agree; yet I still maintained that, on the face of things, we ought soon to depart; not continue to force ourselves

upon her seclusion. And I again reminded him that Martyn would be expecting us.

"Hang Martyn," he said cheerfully. He crossed his legs, slowly and deliberately made himself comfortable in his wicker chair, and lighted one of his long, pale cigars.

A young mulatto girl appeared presently with a silver tray, a violet-tinted, iced drink in tall glasses. Sorrel, I believe she called it, and we found it not at all unpleasant. And then, to our surprise, Régine Maury suddenly reappeared. She had removed her hat, changed her dress for a filmy thing of gray chiffon, and with it, apparently, her mood. She possessed a new brightness, an animation not evident before. Her smile actually transformed her. I remember, particularly, her profile with its small, curved nose, which gave her at moments a peculiarly eager, birdlike appearance. During those few minutes in the house she had changed, almost incredibly; had perhaps come to some obscure feminine decision concerning us. Zimbal, too, sensed the difference in her, for I saw him watching her every movement with a kind of grave fascination.

"So," he remarked, a question in his voice, "you came back here where you were born, hid yourself, and found happiness?"

Looking straight at him, unflinching, she replied:

"After all that happened in Paris—and I think you must have a good memory—what else was left for me?"

He rose; began his confounded habit of pacing slowly up and down, jingling the coins in his trousers' pockets.

"But, heavens! You're wasted! Like most of the French, you believe that France is the only cultivated, appreciative nation in the world. You could have gone anywhere: London, Vienna, Rome—even New York, and would have obtained instant recognition. A talent like yours—"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"I'm happier here." She turned to him. "All this must be boring for you. Probably you don't understand. Mr. Zimbal, as you may know, has a little habit of delving into motives. He considers himself a student of human nature." She smiled, and her smile conveyed the subtlest trace of mockery. I gathered that Zimbal was too much wrapped in himself to observe it; and clever.

"You see," she went on, "in France— I came upon great trouble. Trouble of an evil, disgusting nature. Malice—from some persons unknown." She uttered a little sigh. "The kind of thing which puts an end to any woman's career. If you want to be bored with the details, you must ask Mr. Zimbal to tell you sometime."

He ceased his pacing, and stood, towering, before her.

"Why should he ask me?"

She looked up at him coolly. And again I detected that faint, ironical smile.

"Surely you, as a newspaper man at the time, remember the whole sordid business? Your own paper, I think—the *Paris-Theatre*—attempted to defend me."

"Of course." He shrugged his shoulders; smiled down at her. "But I try to forget such things. If one harbored memories of all the unpleasant things in life—"

"And," she demanded, "does that mean that you think I should try and forget?"

He was at a loss for a reply. A rare occurrence for him. Somewhat impatiently, clumsily, he changed the subject, and began a lengthy discourse about his work in New York, the present state of the American stage. He was one of those many men who are at their very best when talking about their own accomplishments. Even she, Régine Maury, couldn't help being interested;

measure of sadness; eyes that had blue-black shadows beneath them.

I will grant Zimbal this much—he didn't hesitate. He went toward her swiftly, confidently, with that great, springy stride of his; and I remember now—vividly—his sparse, flaxen hair ruffling in the slight breeze as he stood bareheaded, bowing before her.

"So," he said, "here at last is your hiding place, while all Paris misses you and wonders about you."

Actually, that was his greeting. For the barest perceptible instant a distinct expression of alarm hovered over her features. But this was quickly gone. She offered him her hand; said, with a faintly mocking smile:

"Paris and I, you know, are no longer friends."

"You remember me?" he asked her eagerly, in French.

She nodded.

"Of course!"

That was all. She didn't proceed to ask him any questions—where he'd come from; how he happened to be strolling casually through that outlandish little tropical village on that February afternoon. This, I think, disconcerted him at first, but when she made a movement to continue on her way he was at once at her side, in the most natural manner imaginable, introducing me, chatting gayly of our trip, our absurd little adventures. And so, when she turned down a narrow lane between two fields of tall, ripe sugar cane, he at her side, there was nothing for me to do but go with them.

Zimbal supplied most of the conversation. I saw that I need have no worry upon that score. Nevertheless, I felt that there was something vaguely disturbing about the whole situation. Her attitude, I think, was the cause. That, I remember, was the most striking feature about her—the tremendous, complete sense of detachment she conveyed, walking there between the two of

us. It was as if she had, ages ago, surrendered herself to some unfathomable philosophy, perhaps of her own making; as if outside matters, mere human beings, odds and ends such as Zimbal and myself, were of no account. It wasn't rudeness, mind you. Nothing as obvious, as personal, as commonplace as that. She listened to Zimbal politely enough—even laughed at some of his remarks; but that strange remoteness of spirit kept her—oh, miles and miles away from us, and it remained most carefully preserved.

We at length reached the end of the lane; passed through a gate into a formal little garden; a place of narrow, pebbly paths bordered with cactus; of hedges bright with sky-blue plumbago and delicate, pink coralita. Once, through an archway of bamboo, we caught a glimpse of a fountain, and an ivory wall splashed by a wine-colored cascade of buginvilleæ.

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couldn't help laughing at his sharp aphorisms at the expense of our sentimental public.

An hour passed, agreeably enough. When I next looked out beyond the veranda, beyond the white garden wall, the sun was already slipping below the bright margin of the sea—a sea now blinding to look upon as a sheet of hammered gold. A flock of black Caribbean gulls, I remember, hovered and circled in the sky, creating a weird and changing pattern in the red pathway of the sun. You could hear, now and again, the cry of them, remote and plaintive on the still air.

"We must really go," I told Régine Maury, rising, and looked directly at Zimbal.

He seemed to be transformed. He was leaning forward in his chair, his large, white hands splayed over the arms of it, staring at her. In his eyes—those pallidly blue eyes—there was a kind of luminous and terrible brightness. Her back, you see, was for the instant turned to him as she spoke to me.

"But you must both stay for dinner—"

She was polite, but not at all insistent. I explained that Martyn expected us back; that there was some work to be done aboard the boat. And I added, laughing:

"Not that it worries Zimbal. He has a fine contempt for all nautical things."

The mention of his name brought him back to earth. He gave his head a little shake—like a man just waking from a heavy sleep—and pulled himself together; recovered himself.

"My friend has an overwhelming conscience," he told her. "That's his trouble. If he really feels that way, I think we'd better let him go back to work on his precious boat. But I—I'll be glad to stay, Régine."

If the mode of address startled her, she did not reveal the fact. He had drawled out the name slowly, tenderly.

Then and there I became certain that I detested him.

"Remember," I warned him, picking up my Panama, "Martyn is sailing at midnight, sharp. He won't stand any delay."

He nodded brusquely. A definite antagonism had at last come to the surface between us; and his anxiety for me to depart at the earliest possible opportunity was wholly evident. He made no attempt to conceal it now.

Régine Maury accompanied me in silence to the garden gate, offered me her hand, gave me a subdued, inscrutable little smile, and then turned toward her house. Looking back through the deepening blueness of the dusk, I could still see the vague, white bulk of Zimbal, the red glow of his cigar, where his chair was tipped comfortably against one of the veranda's columns. But I wasn't thinking of Zimbal at the time. I was thinking of Régine Maury's hand as she had bidden me good-by. An attractively slender white hand. Cool and fresh to all appearances, her fingers when they came into contact with mine had been a surprise, a distinct shock. They had been hot, dry—no; more than that—they had been burning.

Not long after eleven Martyn and I had been forced back to the yacht. Forced, I say, because that town—Fort-de-France—had, with a curious abruptness, made up its mind to go to bed. Within the space of a few minutes a hundred lights had been extinguished, cafés and shops had been closed to the heavy rattle of shutters, streets had been left deserted. It had been an aimless kind of evening; one of those occasions when you wander hither and thither in a small, strange town, visiting cafés and places of amusement, conversing here and there with a native, picking up odd bits of information, the while secretly thanking your lucky stars that you, personally, are free and not destined to

spend the rest of your life in the place. At the wharf head we had discovered our dory, where we had left it, bobbing idly at the end of a painter; had boarded it; had lighted our pipes, and made ourselves as comfortable as we could. We'd stay there tied to the wharf for a while, Martyn suggested. The yacht was lying about three hundred yards from shore, and there'd be no use making two trips out to her. Zimbal, he reminded me, should be along at any minute now. And in the white, circular flood of the arc light at the head of the wharf he'd easily find us.

It was not a perfect tropical night, and for that reason I think we both found it welcome. It wasn't gorgeous, spectacular, like most of those Caribbean nights. It had, rather, a healthy, normal quality to it, so that we could almost imagine ourselves at home, up north. The stars were faint. The moon, high above us, was veiled frequently by racing clouds like thin, black smoke, and from the harbor's mouth there came a cool, steady breeze. Martyn, I knew, was already aching for the sea.

Shortly after midnight I saw him consult his radium-dialed watch. And although I couldn't see his face I knew that he was frowning.

"It's a long walk," I reminded him, and I showed him a cluster of yellow pin points wavering on the dark hillside away to the north of Fort-de-France. "The house is over there, somewhere. He may be a little late."

"What's he up to, anyway?" he demanded. There was a palpable irritation in his voice quite foreign to him.

"I told you. He's dining out—with a friend."

He leaned toward me.

"Oh, don't be a damn fool. You know what I mean. What's he driving at? There's something not pleasant, not straight. I could tell from your tone, when you got back."

"Why should you concern yourself

about all this?" I asked him. "You don't even know her. Besides, she'll be perfectly capable of dealing with him. She's clever. He'll be back at any moment, probably disgruntled and sulking."

But, unfortunately, he did not come. And so we sat on and on, waiting, bobbing up and down in the pitch darkness. Martyn once started a discussion upon the literature of the sea, upon Conrad and Melville, and the rest, but his mind wasn't really on his subject, and after a while he relapsed into silence—sat there brooding, puffing gently at his pipe. I lost all track of time; even dozed a little, I think. All at once he leaped up; began hurriedly to untie the painter that held us to the wharf.

"I wish to God," he said vehemently, "that I hadn't brought Zimbal along. I apologize to you and Rodson. The bounder!"

The term struck me as ineffectual; even ludicrous. You couldn't very well describe Zimbal as a bounder. It sounded weak, and, certainly, that was the last impression he created.

"Who is this woman, anyway?" Martyn demanded. "I heard him talking in his oily way about her the other night." He was harassed; indignant. He was, you can readily comprehend, what is called a man's man. His ideas were poles apart from the ideas of men like Zimbal. And one couldn't help loving him for the fact.

I told him, then and there, as much as I knew about Régine Maury.

"Of course," he stated out of a clear sky, "Zimbal wrote the article that finished her career, and contrived to get it published in some rotten little sheet."

I was stunned; not because of the madness of the idea, but because that identical suspicion had been lurking, growing, in my own mind. And, suddenly, I knew that he had hit upon the truth.

"Motive?" I asked him.

Like many innocent men he had, at

times, a sharp insight into human nature, a singular clarity and directness of thought.

"She turned him down," he said promptly. "Spite! Surely you can see that? His pride has always been abnormal. And with thwarted love added to it——"

He was fumbling, groping at the bottom of the boat for the oars. He was obliged to light a match, and for the briefest instant I caught a glimpse of his face, his mouth a straight, merciless line.

"And then," I went on, more and more amazed at this new aspect of the situation, "this intrusion to-day, this attempt to revive the whole affair?"

Martyn had an answer to this.

"It's the kind of rotten, swaggering act he'd be capable of, isn't it?" he snapped at me. He had at last found the oars, and was slipping them into the rowlocks. And at that very moment we heard Zimbal, singing, away down at the other end of the wharf. Singing, I remember, "*La donna é mobile*" in his deep, resonant bass.

Martyn climbed onto the wharf; I followed him.

"You'll hear a piece of my mind," he warned me. He was looking at his watch under the arc light. It was nearly two.

"Look here," I said. "I wish you'd calm down. This is, after all, Zimbal's affair. And a man of his temperament——"

"Damn his temperament. He'll have to curb it, while he's my guest."

"Anyway, don't have words now; put it off until the morning," I suggested. I was, to tell the truth, utterly weary; sick of the whole business.

He looked at me, and touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"You're right, old man. But, you see, I can't help hating—all this kind of thing."

Zimbal stepped, then, out of the dark-

ness into the white ring of the arc light. He appeared tremendous. Under his right arm he carried a plaited straw basket which positively bulged with a ripe, pale-green fruit. Mangos. He was eating one of them as he approached us. You could hear the soft, juicy smack of his lips. It occurred to me that even eating fruit could be a test of character.

"Hello! Hello!" His greeting was cheerful—irritatingly so.

"Look at this," he said, indicating the basket. "Mangos, ripe and luscious, from madame's garden. A souvenir, given to me just as I left the house. Gad! She's a wonderful woman."

He put his hand into the basket; picked out a fruit; squeezed it, to test its ripeness. Something—something that looked like a fragment of lemon-colored worsted—curved upward from the basket. And then, for the fraction of a second, it seemed to us that Zimbal was wearing a yellow bracelet upon his fat, white wrist. The bracelet unwound; dropped to the wharf. It went wriggling swiftly into a crack between two planks—and disappeared.

He stood open-mouthed, motionless, there before us, that absurd little fruit basket still under his arm. He had upon his face the blank, puzzled expression one sometimes sees on a very young child.

"I——" His hand flew to his collar. Every vestige of color fled from him. And then his features became suddenly and hideously distorted. He flung up his arms; fell forward upon his face; lay still.

In one incredible moment it was all over. He, Zimbal, lay there at our feet utterly still. He might have been a part of the wharf, a log. Martyn knelt down to unbutton his shirt, and to touch his heart. After that he examined, closely, Zimbal's wrist. I can see him now kneeling there in that white flood of light, calm and grave and silent; and

I can still remember the dull, flat thud of Zimbal's wrist, when he released it and it struck the planks of the wharf.

He stood up. He took from his pocket a handkerchief, and methodically wiped his hands. And, having done this, he remained motionless for fully a minute, standing there, gazing into the darkness toward the harbor's entrance.

Then he took me gently by the arm. "Come!" he said. "We'll get him

back—to the boat." He hesitated, looked at me, a question in his eyes. "There's nothing else for us to do—is there?"

I shook my head. I think we understood each other—perfectly. He lifted his lean, tanned face toward the stars and breathed eagerly, greedily, the salt-laden breeze.

"I want," he said slowly, "to get out—to the open."



MIXED MAGIC

WHEN I was a blithe and a festive Lothario
 Who fooled and philandered about,
 My life was a seven-reel feature scenario
 Compounded of thrills and of doubt.
 I couldn't decide among girls multifarious
 Who kept all my senses awlirl,
 And, torn between charmers so charmingly various,
 I longed for a composite girl!

A girl with a tip-tilted nose such as Phyllis',
 A lass with the laughter of Prue,
 A girl with the eyes that are sweet Amaryllis',
 The mouth and the dimples of Sue;
 The voice of Elaine and the figure of Marigold,
 And Pearl's yellow tresses that curl
 And glint in the sun like the loveliest fairy gold—
 I wanted a composite girl!

Then you came along, who were like unto none of them,
 No, not in the slightest degree,
 With never a feature belonging to one of them;
 And yet it seems patent to me
 That you're the composite of beauty and mystery
 Of each of them—Phyllis to Pearl—
 And also of all of the charmers of history,
 For you are my composite girl!

BERTON BRALEY.



The Conjuror's Lady

By Izola Forrester

Author of "Cafe in Cairo,"
"Salvage," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

When, after the ship sailed, Talbot Palmer entered the stateroom which he had reserved for his sister Marion, and found there the girl he had seen for the first time at the Café Tavary in Paris a few nights before, and when she calmly suggested that he should allow her to return with him to New York in Marion's place, he perceived that he could no longer disclaim a tendency to adventure. And when, the voyage over, the charming and mysterious stranger took temporary refuge in his home from the pursuit of Lopez, international adventurer, whose stateroom she confessed to having searched before they landed, Talbot found himself hoping that this adventure would not end. Yetive's disappearance from his house and from his life revealed to him how difficult it would be to carry on without her.

CHAPTER V.

IT was not without an inner accusation of personal guilt that Talbot cabled Marion his love and happiest wishes a week later, urging her by all means to remain over with the Picards and Bronsons during their Italian tour, if she cared to. Even with all due caution, however, the message carried its own countercharge of suspicion, and Marion's reply was characteristic.

Why so willing? Leaving Naples with Bronsons the seventeenth. Find no trace of ticket or passports at Cherbourg.

The following morning a letter arrived, written the day after his own departure from France. Didi, it appeared, had made a special trip to Cherbourg after her ticket and passport, before they left for Italy, and had found neither at the steamship offices. Marion surmised that he had forgotten to leave them for her. Would he send them back at once to the new address in Rome? They planned to spend at least a week in Lombardy at the Marsiglia estate. The countess was a sister of Peppino di Cattaponi, one of the most popular younger women at court. Pep-

pino planned to make their stay a festive affair, and he would probably return with them.

My precious pal, would you be shocked and disgusted if I told you that I am almost in love with him? He's the best yet, anyway, Tolly, and his record is positively heroic, did you know that?

Talbot read the eight-page letter with quick sympathy. It was queer to think that Marion had been hit about the same time as himself, and with the halo of romance over her love, too. He mused over what she had disclosed, recalling Di Cattaponi's face, lean, dark, strongly featured, the slashing scar under one side of his jaw, and his careless comment on it when Marion had asked how he had received it.

"We never discuss our scars," he had told her laughingly.

He wondered whether their mutually catching this contagion of romance was not a swift reaction from their repressed lives. Discipline, culture, ancestor worship—this had been their round since childhood. Often he wondered why the rock-ribbed Massachusetts soil around the coasts should have produced families like his own, each infant swaddled in

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inhibitions and prejudices, drilled in the things they must never do, and in the profound excellence of all progenitors.

At every stage of their growth, he thought bitterly, Marion and he had been confronted with some supreme family ruler whom all feared, and endeavored to placate and live up to. Grandparents, granduncles and aunts, uncles and aunts, each passing on in embalmed traditions. He himself had been plastic and without even resentment as they had shaped his life for him and laid out his career. But now both stood alone, Marion at twenty-two and himself at twenty-six, with the accumulated fortunes pyramiding about them. He wondered if the Count di Cattaponi were altogether actuated by romance in seeking Marion Palmer for his wife; possibly, too, this unknown girl, Yetive, was not entirely the elusive gift of chance to himself. In recovering Marion's vanity case, she might easily have found a suggestion there that had sent her as a lady of fortune on board the *Caronia*.

But while he strove to be sane and even cynical, Talbot still found himself possessed by a restlessness and longing he had never dreamed possible. From that moment when he had discovered her flight, he had rushed from the house, to Sutton's astonishment, seeking Yetive with headlong intent. Taxis were infrequent on the side street. She must have walked to the corner of Fifth Avenue or Madison to have caught one. There were few people in sight, yet no more sign of the slender, alert figure than if the earth had opened and closed over her. After a fruitless search up and down adjacent streets, he had walked for hours with a dogged hope of seeing her in the crowds.

After three days, he faced the problem with more coolness, assembling all that he really knew of her, and striving to find by deduction some clew to her purpose in coming to the States. She

had assured him how imperative it was for her to be in Washington on the twenty-ninth. There was still time for her to do this, yet he watched the daily lists in the hotel-register bulletin, hoping to find her name—Yetive—somewhere in the city's new arrivals.

Again, at night, he would sit in his own room, listening for a possible call on the telephone, recalling the night he had first met her at the Café Tavary, of her companion, Romlen Rolland, obviously a favored admirer of La Quezada. She had pleaded with him about something and they had quarreled. Then had come the final scene with the uproar in the café, and the flight of Yetive.

He remembered what Didi had said—that Rolland was the son of some famous chemist. He had gathered that this man was dead, that the boy held the secret of some priceless formula that some one was after. It was all vague and disconnected in his own mind. He wished he had told Yetive this much which he knew already, and had won her confidence.

She had more than once told him her mission to America was one of danger and uncertainty, so far as her own safety was concerned. Also, that she had no right to think of love, since her life was not her own to give. At times the memory of her charm and delicate beauty assailed his imagination with acute poignancy. Always she had seemed to him poised for flight, arrested for an instant at the meeting of their eyes and all that she had found in that amazing revelation, but fearful of anything that would divert her from her goal.

She had seemed so splendidly alive, so absolutely game, he thought, as she had hesitated on the threshold of Marion's room. Often he stood in the hall, visualizing her standing there opposite to him, her dark eyes with their quality of velvet softness, large pupils,

and upcurling lashes. It seemed as if she were always watching for some expected peril. He had longed to bring content to them and love's languor.

At other times he found himself troubled over her finances. Certainly she had come on the boat with nothing but a small overnight suit case. She had been even forced to wear some of Marion's gowns on the voyage, yet had taken nothing away with her. He did not know whether she was equipped with adequate funds or not, whether she realized the cost of traveling and living over here. He asked himself disgustedly why he had not compelled her to accept enough money to tide her over. The thought that she might be friendless and suffering was acute agony to him.

The latchkey was the one hope, the only tangible link between them. At least she knew that with it, she might always find a port of safety. Several times during the night he had started up from his bed, imagining that he heard a light footfall in the corridor outside his door, hesitating, passing on to Marion's room. Flinging a robe about him, he would rush to the door, only to find stairs and halls deserted, no sound at all, and Marion's room complacent in its rose-and-silver taffeta, waiting for its rightful owner's return, accusing him of treachery.

During that first week after his arrival, he had avoided looking up friends or frequenting his usual haunts. He was afraid of being away from the house, in case she happened to call him up; that in some way he might fail her at a crucial moment. Twice Serafin Lopez had called at the house, Sutton told him, asking for Miss Palmer. Flowers arrived daily from the most exclusive shop in town; there were several calls a day on the telephone, all from the South American.

"What did you tell him?" Talbot had asked, noting Sutton's thoughtful ex-

pression. "I suppose Miss Marion met him abroad and probably told him she was crossing with me."

"Doubtless, sir," Sutton agreed. "I merely told him each time he called that Miss Palmer was not at home. He asked what time she would be in, and I referred him to you, sir, as I could not be totally certain myself."

Talbot was silent, touched by the clean fineness of the old man's delicacy and faith in himself. There had always been Sutton around ever since he could remember, a legacy from his grandfather. At various crucial moments in his own boyhood Sutton's diplomacy had saved him from family consequences. He glanced over at him now, oddly boyish in his embarrassment and reticence.

"You're decent, Sutton," he said, "awfully. Keep him out."

"Yes, sir, so I judged, sir," Sutton came back evasively.

Another time, on Sunday morning, as Talbot sat reading his paper after breakfast, Sutton lingered with obvious intent. His right hand strayed to his side pocket several times and was restrained. Finally he came up behind Talbot's chair and laid on the table beside him a small, crumpled, gray-suede glove.

"I found it lying in the lower hall, sir. It's too small for Mrs. Macy. I thought possibly it might be one of Miss Marion's, since it had been there some time."

Talbot stared at the glove, the color rising in spite of his effort at self-control.

"Hardly three months, Sutton," he replied. "Just where did you find it?"

"In the lower hall, sir, just back of the street door, as I was cleaning up a bit."

"Thank you, Sutton," he said briefly. That was all, but he felt that Sutton was perfectly aware of all that was going on, and again he felt under an obligation to him. He might easily

have thrown the glove away, and so destroyed one link in the endless chain. Evidently he possessed an unsuspected technique in these matters.

When he was alone, Talbot held the glove a long while, brooding over it. Its pearl clasp bore the monogram of a noted glove house in Paris. The sole perfume was of cigarettes where she had probably held them. He placed it away in a small, locked drawer in his desk with a deep sigh. It was the only personal article he had of hers as a souvenir.

At the end of the second week, he found himself losing ground in his own belief that she would return of her own free will. If she had really cared, she would have realized his torture in losing her, she would have sent him some word, some reassurance, at least, of her safety. He even watched the passenger lists of outgoing ships for fear she might slip back to Europe, but there was every probability, if she did so, that she would take another name, so this was hopeless.

Several times, in desperation, he even thought of hunting up Serafin Lopez, of cultivating his friendship with the idea of getting some information from him ultimately, but, disliking the man as he did, he could not bring himself to believe there was any secret knowledge between him and Yette. Certainly she had succeeded in making him believe that she was Marion Palmer, that she was living there in the same house with Talbot, a double-track ruse that would leave her free to come and go as she liked elsewhere.

It was with relief that he finally received a wireless from Marion in mid-ocean saying she would arrive the following Saturday. Sutton received the announcement with absolute impassivity of countenance, merely asking if he should inform Mr. Lopez of the date, since he was calling up daily.

"Great Scott! no," Talbot returned

irritably. "She doesn't want to know that type of man, Sutton, you understand. I don't want her even to see him again."

"Perfectly, sir."

"Always say we're out."

"I do, sir," said Sutton innocently, and left the room, with Talbot as usual in doubt as to his undercurrent of meaning.

The Picards had deferred sailing, but Marion had crossed with Rex Bronson and his wife, Signa; also Peppino di Cattaponi.

"Had a wonderful time, Tolly, darling," she exclaimed when they met. "I've almost forgiven you for losing my ticket and passport, because I believe it was fate. Peppino fixed up everything for me at the consulate in Rome, and here I am. Be human, Tolly, please, and understand."

This last in an undertone, with eager pleading in her eyes. He laughed and kissed her.

"I don't care what you do; I'm with you, dear," he said, and Marion stared at him in blank surprise.

That evening the Bronsons gave a dinner and box party at the theater. Marion and the count were absorbed solely in their own drama, and Talbot found himself listening with coasting tendencies to Signa's criticism of the play and New York, and all America at large, while he looked about at the sea of faces, seeking, as he always did now in crowds, for the one. Suddenly Signa's hand was laid on his arm.

"Do look, Tolly," she whispered. "That woman with the white hair opposite who just came in. That's Mrs. Brockway Chilton, sister of the dowager duchess of something—Leominster, I think it was. She's just back from England, and terribly much 'it' over there. I wonder who the girl is."

Talbot glanced across the theater without interest at the slender, white-haired woman in rust-colored velvet and

ermine. Her profile was like Goldsmith's, he thought, uneven, humorous, oddly youthful for her age. Beside her, her back half turned to the audience, was a girl of about eighteen. So ingénue and demure she seemed in daffodil chiffon that Talbot could not believe his eyes. He reached for Signa's opera glasses and stared through them eagerly, hungrily, as a stranded man in a desert stares at a mirage. And suddenly she turned her head, and there was no possibility of mistaking her profile and eyes. It was Yetive.

CHAPTER VI.

It seemed as if the intensity of his gaze compelled her to look across the space between them. He was standing behind Signa Bronson's chair as the curtain fell and the lights went on, and while he could not be positive, since there was not the slightest change of expression on her face, no sign of surprise or confusion, yet he was sure she had recognized him. Instantly she turned her head away, and leaned forward in conversation with Mrs. Chilton.

Marion was looking up at him questioningly. They were too close together in sympathies for any exceptional act on his part to escape her intuition.

"Did you see any one you know, Tolly?" she asked as he started to leave the box. Before he could evade her curiosity Peppino claimed her full attention eagerly, and for the first time he felt a fraternal impulse toward him.

He reached the back of the theater behind the first-balcony tiers of seats, and stood looking down again at the Chilton box. Several men had joined its occupants, and he felt that this was the wrong way to reach her. She had not shown the slightest recognition of him, not even a shadow of a smile, or inclination of her head. Evidently she was here as the guest of this woman under some other cloak of identity, and

did not wish him to betray her. Still, he could watch her; at least, he swore to himself, she should not get away from him this time. He would not let her out of his sight until he had spoken to her, had received some assurance that she would let him see her. She seemed so entirely at her ease with this new group that vaguely it annoyed him. When the curtain rose on the second act, he returned to the box, striving for nerve control, from any betrayal of interest that would make Marion more curious.

Evidently the count still absorbed her attention, as she did not notice his return. He took the seat farthest back where he could catch a glimpse of Yetive without the risk of being observed himself. The maddening part of it all was her complete ignoring of him, her poise and composure. Not once did she turn her head to even glance at the opposite box or its occupants, but at least he could fill his eyes with the sight of her, could know that she was in a protected position instead of being exposed to the thousand-and-one perils he had imagined. It was irritating to think that she had not considered it obligatory in any way to let him know this after his having given her every aid in his power when she had needed and demanded it.

He sat through the remainder of the play without noticing the stage or actors. Signa, watching him, smiled with repressed amusement. She was older than Ted, and had been the youthful type of American widow in Paris when he had married her. After Betty Picard's effervescence and Marion's happy common sense, Signa's sophistication had its own appeal. Following the line of his gaze, she leaned her head back and whispered:

"I know her name now."

There was no evading the direct attack; besides, he was eager to get all the information possible. He bent over

her as she said in a tone that could not reach Marion's ears:

"She is the daughter of a lifelong friend of Mrs. Chilton's, and has always lived abroad. Her name is Justine Trelease. Do you know her, Tolly?"

"I—thought that I did," he replied. She read his perplexity and embarrassment with amusement in her hazel eyes.

"But you like her, don't you? I used to know Belle Chilton before her aunt became a duchess. Perhaps I may be able to attack her mother for you. Belle's somewhere over here, and I'd like to see her again."

"How did you find out her name?" he asked awkwardly.

"I asked Major Powell when he stopped for a moment to say 'Hello!' to us. He's an old friend of the Chiltons', I know; used to be in the diplomatic service with them before the war; perfect old darling."

"They're leaving," said Talbot, suddenly rising from his chair. She laid her hand on his coat sleeve gently.

"Guard your drive, old dear, and I'll manage it for you to-morrow."

It was several minutes before the final curtain. He took the shorter route down the small, circular staircase from the box out to the foyer. Yet when he reached it, he found only a few scattered ushers. There was absolutely no sign of either Yette or Mrs. Chilton. Thinking that they might have paused at the cloak room, he haunted the lobby until the curtain fell and people began to come out. The only person other than himself who left early, had been a tall, gray-haired man who had paused a moment to light a cigarette, then gone out through the center swinging doors. In desperation, Talbot made his way outside to the starter. The man was busy marshaling crowding cars along the curb, whistling and calling numbers. When he was asked if he knew the Chilton car, he shook his head. Did two ladies leave just before the theater

let out? People shouldered him to one side, and he was separated from the starter. How on earth, he wondered, had she managed to leave without his seeing her? At least it proved that she had recognized him, and was trying to escape meeting him. Ted Bronson's cool voice at his shoulder steered him into their waiting limousine.

"We're all going up to the Palatine Club," Marion told him gayly, as they took their place in the long line of slow-moving, honking cars going toward Broadway. "I want Peppino to see some of our night life, Tolly; he boasts so of Rome and Nice."

"I think I'll ask you to drop me off at the club, Ted," Talbot remarked carelessly.

"No, you won't any such thing. You're toddling right along," Marion protested. "I've left you unguarded altogether too long."

"Mutual consideration, wasn't there, Marion?" Signa's hand closed about his arm significantly. "But there really is some awfully good food and music up at Gregor's. Ted knows him, so that helps. He's not an exiled prince, thank Heaven." She slipped lower down on the heavily cushioned seat, and took a cigarette from Talbot's proffered case. "Run up for tea to-morrow, Tolly, and I'll tell you all I promised."

The Palatine Club was on the upper East Side, a famous old residence taken over and remodeled into a Russian interior, while exposing to the world at large its usual face of brownstone. The brilliant coloring delighted Marion. Arched doorways led from room to room. Great cathedral candles of black and orange and vivid turquoise blue burned in huge, brass holders six and seven feet high. From somewhere came music like the gypsy strains in "Chauve Souris."

Ted led the way up to the second floor where they were dancing.

"It's better upstairs," he said, "if we

can get a table." The rest waited while he negotiated with Gregor, a blond, loose-limbed person with heavy-lidded, sleepy eyes, dozing at a table near the hooded fireplace. The burning logs sent forth a peculiarly aromatic fragrance, a blend of incense and sandalwood. There were few couples dancing. They moved with more rhythmic grace than the usual Broadway celebrants, Talbot thought as he watched them; more as if it were part of a mystic rite. Perhaps the music produced the effect, too, with its strangely hypnotic cadence. He would have liked sitting by himself at an isolated table, listening and remembering Yevie.

Upstairs there were less people and more sumptuous surroundings. From dim corners shone the gleam of polished copper and brass. A high frieze of figures in a Muscovite bridal procession passed about the room with its vaulted ceiling like a chapel. Between the windows hung a painting by Vereshchagin—an encounter between Tartars and Cossacks in a swirling snowstorm. It seemed as if the plunging hoofs of the rearing horses must descend in trampling panic on the heads of the late guests.

There were hardly half a dozen tables placed about the two long rooms, with an eye to seclusiveness, but hardly were they seated than Marion noticed two men seated at one of the near-by tables, watching her attentively. Both rose eagerly, evidently with the expectancy of being recognized.

"Talbot, dear, who are those men?" she asked. "They seem to know us."

Turning his head, Talbot was surprised and annoyed to find Serafin Lopez and Captain Bacharach smiling at him with delighted impatience. He bowed to them, and at once Lopez came toward them. His brilliant, dark eyes took in the personnel of the party, lingering on Marion.

"It is most unexpected that we meet

again," he exclaimed. "And your most beautiful sister—ah, Señorita Marion, I am at your feet as usual."

To some Jove's thunderbolts bring only paralysis. Talbot's nerves refused to register any impression whatever. He was aware only of Marion's startled eyes seeking his own for an explanation. Stiffly, he found himself introducing Lopez to the Bronsons and Di Cataponi. The South American turned eagerly to Marion.

"I have sought to see you every single day," he began. "Where have you been?"

She turned her head so that he caught his first view of her full face, and realized she was not the girl he had seen with Talbot on shipboard.

"I think there is some mistake," she began clearly. "I do not remember our ever meeting before."

"Ah, so?" He laughed and laid one hand on Talbot's shoulder. "The resemblance is so remarkable between this Miss Palmer and her sister, you must pardon my mistake."

"But I am Talbot's only sister," Marion insisted, "and I only returned from Italy to-day."

"But the other one," he begged, "the little sister—she who was most adorable on the boat—where is she? Have you hidden her away from me, Señor Tolly?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," Marion said, with quick reserve. "Can you explain, Talbot?"

"I don't see that there is anything to explain," he returned easily, while his gaze measured swords with Lopez for a future encounter. The latter shrugged significant shoulders.

"Of course, it is possible that I have not met Miss Palmer before; I see now the difference between her and the person whom I thought she was. You will pardon my mistake."

Ted laughed over the incident after Lopez had returned to his own table.

Bacharach had watched the entire scene in attentive silence. The two engaged at once in conversation.

"He's been drinking vodka and seeing double, that's all," Ted said. "What do we eat here, Signa?"

But the expression on Marion's face was voluble to Talbot. For himself, he felt out of their immediate zone, transported to one of safety, since he was sure that Yotive was well and alive. A rare and utterly new spirit of deviltry and adventure possessed him. He felt himself in combat with Lopez, with Marion, with Yotive—above all, with the unknown forces which held her from him. He found himself mentally stabilized, confident, capable of handling any bewildering or embarrassing situation which Lopez might precipitate, should he get dangerous.

In the midst of a dance later on in the evening, Signa glanced up at him with amused eyes.

"You know you're like a rocking airplane trying to make a get-away," she said. "Run along if you want to."

He left her at the end of the music, and went to the floor below where he found telephone booths secluded from the diners. It was easy to find the name, Mrs. Brockway Chilton, and the address on upper Fifth Avenue. As he hesitated, thrilled at the idea of calling the number, and getting Yotive on the wire, it occurred to him that he would not know whom to ask for. She might answer if he asked for Miss Trelease. As he started to enter the nearest booth Lopez hailed him with exaggerated camaraderie, his voice uncertain from too much champagne.

"So, I stumble upon the affair *en voyage*!" he exclaimed. "The señor is the secret lover, the fortunate man, yes? It is the most mysterious and beautiful young lady, that little sister of yours." He laughed tantalizingly. "Not that I blame you, señor, understand, only for this. That you should make a fool out

of me, Serafin Lopez, to my face, over such a woman; that you should tell me I am not a fit person for her to meet, to dance with, it is ridiculous——"

Talbot's right arm shot forward before he could restrain himself, striking the South American under his jaw, sending him in a crumpled heap against the side of the booth. Bacharach came hurrying up and assisted his friend to his feet.

"You're a couple of damned fools to start anything here," he urged. "Cut it, Serafin."

But Lopez lurched forward from the restraining arms that held him. The blood from his cut lip trickled down over his chin as he tried to reach Talbot.

"You know your own law over here," Lopez said between set teeth. "You know what I can report to the authorities, and, damn you, I will!"

"You may have any satisfaction you like," returned Talbot quietly. He turned around and went back to his own party. Bacharach would get Lopez away without further disturbance. He was not afraid of that. But he knew the man had spoken the exact truth. They could get all the evidence necessary to deport Yotive and convict him, if a charge was made against him by the South American. He had passed off a strange girl as his own sister, had brought her into the country deliberately under a false passport. He grinned slowly as he lighted a fresh cigarette, listening to the *czigany* music with its call to the wild. Yes, he decided mentally, with satisfaction, Talbot Bradford Palmer was making up for declined opportunities.

CHAPTER VII.

The Chilton town house was a spacious, red-brick residence on Washington Square North. Broad, white-stone steps led up to its entrance. English ivy strayed halfway over its face. An iron wrought railing brought from Sienna

followed the curve of its steps and about the first-floor balcony. Nine months of the year it was closed while its mistress lived in London and Paris, or followed spring to the Riviera.

After her return from the theater that night, Yetive paced the floor of her room restlessly. She had seen and recognized Talbot Palmer in the opposite box, and had feigned illness at the end of the play in order to leave before the fall of the curtain. It had been hard to evade the solitude of Major Powell. He had shown a deep interest in her over in London, inspired, she liked to believe, by the Rolland proposition, not by any personal attraction he might feel for herself.

Anne Chilton had left them together purposely, when they arrived from the theater. He had waited for her to speak, putting the full responsibility upon her whim or discretion, she thought. But she had crossed, instead, over to the long windows, and had stood there, gazing out at the moonlit glory of the Square, the fountain rising and falling with a faint, musical cadence in the stillness. Late motor buses threaded back and forth with a rhythmic hum. The leaf shadows on the sidewalk below seemed tangible, so black they lay. For the first time since her arrival in New York, Yetive felt a strange, sickening wave of utter loneliness, not for Paris, but for her childhood home in Belgium. Beauty held in the magic circle of an old garden and orchard, the stone house with its clambering, flowering vines, and air of security, just six miles from Fontenoy.

She sighed involuntarily, and Harry Powell stepped to her side, breaking the silence himself.

"I expected you here during the summer—any time, in fact, since May. When I had no word, I thought there might be some reason why you had changed your mind."

"No, nothing like that," she said

quickly. "There were things to settle and arrange after my father's death, but—well, you see, I am here as I promised." She smiled back at him over her shoulder with eager assurance.

"Then you have the formula with you?"

It was a question she had been dreading ever since she had first seen him. Now that it had been asked, she found herself numb to its shock, indifferent for the moment to the one, great issue that had been paramount in her life before she had met Talbot Palmer. Tonight it was the memory of his face that possessed her, visualized before her as she looked out into the misty, glamorous darkness of the Square.

"I waited for you to speak," Powell resumed quietly. "If you're not ready, I can wait. I have relied upon the promise which you gave me in London, of course, that you would not present it elsewhere." He paused. Yetive lifted her gaze to the cross of light which shone on the tower above the foliage of the trees. Its steadfast radiance gave her a certain courage to hear his next words, even while she anticipated them.

"To-day we received a report from one of our French operatives saying this same proposition has been considered by a South American syndicate headed by Serafin Lopez. Did you know of this?"

"I knew, yes, but only after I went to Paris."

"Have you any idea who could have offered it to Lopez?"

She turned about to face him.

"It was never offered to him. I could swear to that. I have a younger brother, Major Powell, a boy of nineteen. Lopez set a trap for Romlen while I was still at Fontenoy."

"What is your brother's name?" Powell's tone was compassionate but inexorable.

She closed her eyes, hands clenched as they hung at her sides.

"You must trust me absolutely, or I will not go one step further. You know his name already, so why should you torture me? Your secret operatives in Paris have kept you in touch with every movement he has made, no doubt. But what has he to do with us? I love him devotedly, but I feel that I must save him from Lopez, no matter what I have to do."

"The nation controlling the Rolland formula will control the automotive power of the next war. Lopez has no patriotic or even altruistic scruples in securing it. His group merely seek ultimate control of all commodities of war."

"But I want my mother's country to have this. I told you so in London," she pleaded eagerly. "I do not believe that Romlen would sell out his share. How could he without me? He would not dare."

The sound of Anne Chilton's laughter came from the staircase as she descended it with several friends. Powell looked down into Yetive's wide, dark eyes, and believed her in spite of what he knew to be the truth.

"You have been frank with me," he said. "It is fair that you should know what I do. The word from Paris to us is that your brother has sold out to the Lopez group. That is why I felt I must speak to you to-night."

She stared back at him in bewilderment.

"But it is impossible. How could he sell what he does not possess? I have——"

"Justine, where are you and Harry hiding?" Mrs. Chilton asked as she came into the long room. "We're going to play for a while. It's early."

People began arriving after the theaters let out. Anne Chilton's late parties were select and desirable affairs. Yetive was grateful for the interruption, and escaped as soon as she could to her own room on the third floor. She felt that she must be alone, away from

the casual talk and mirth. Her temples were throbbing with a dull pain that penetrated even behind her eyeballs. She did not turn on the lights, but crouched on the broad window seat, her head back on the cushions, hands clasped before her on her knees as if in silent prayer.

The past year and its happenings seemed to flow back and forth through her consciousness, like waves at low tide. She remembered her childhood years in the convent of St. Marie de la Tour, her mother's sudden death, and the lonely years that followed. She herself had been sent to England to live at Bosviror, her aunt's place in Cornwall. Lady Trelease was rarely down there. Her social duties kept her in London, and there had been a long succession of dreary months, loveless, friendless, for the brilliant, joyous girl who had thought the world a garden of happiness and peace, like the old one at Fontenoy.

The same sense of isolation descended upon her now. She had been through one season in London before her father's death, had met Anne Chilton and enjoyed the unexpected warmth of her friendship. Harry Powell had been interested in her from their first meeting. He was considerably older, and she found herself relying upon his judgment after her father's death even to the point of confiding the secret of the Rolland formula which he had completed.

When she had returned to Belgium and found Romlen gone, even then she had not realized that there could be any danger of his attempting to dispose of the formula without consulting her. She had followed him to Paris to secure his consent to Powell handling their interests in America, only to discover that Romlen had become infatuated with La Quesada, the most notorious woman of the hour in the capital. Amazed and furious at his ignoring her, Yetive suspected the dancer of being Lopez's spy.

She had investigated her record through Powell's Paris office, and had pleaded with her brother to relinquish his share of the formula. Roinlen had resented her interference, had sworn he had no intention of selling his share to Lopez, yet at the last, that night at the Café Tavary, he had turned on her savagely and said he had sold out to the South American.

As she sat now in the enfolding darkness, her own obligation swept over her. Seven years of her father's life had been spent on the formula that was to be his offering to humanity in memory of his lost son, Noel Rolland, the first Belgian ace to fall in the war. In the hands of Lopez, it would become a means of terrific destruction, where Rolland had meant it as his supreme gift to world peace.

She had given Powell, up to now, the impression that she controlled the entire formula. Its division between herself and Roinlen had been her father's plan to secure unity. Each must agree before any final disposition could be made of their legacy. She longed to see Talbot, to talk with him, to confess everything to him, and ask his advice at this crucial time.

Rising, she crossed to her dressing table, and unlocked one of its drawers. The pass-key given her by Talbot lay hidden in an Algerian purse of red leather, deeply embossed in gold. She held the key on her palm musingly, a little smile on her close lips. She admired Talbot Palmer. He had strength, control, poise, humor—all that Serafin Lopez lacked. The South American was too frankly pagan in his attitude toward women ever to attract her. While he had never inspired her with fear, she had found him too willing and ardent an admirer on board the *Caronia* to respect his strategy.

At the soft rap on her door, she slipped the key back into the purse out of sight, and closed the drawer. Mrs.

Chilton's maid stepped in at her response, and gave her a letter addressed to Justine Trelease.

"I am sorry that I forgot it, mam-selle," she said deprecatingly. "It came early in the evening."

After she had gone, Yotive tore open the envelope and read the message, a sickening dread gripping her. It was from Roinlen.

When your letter came to-day, I could have killed myself. I believed that you had returned to Fontenoy. I lied to you that night at the Café Tavary. I had not sold out to Lopez. He sailed without the formula. La Quesada was his agent here. If he discovers now that he has been tricked, that she brings only one half to him, he will have me killed. The whole thing is accursed. A woman has no fine sense of fair play. You did this thing to me deliberately to break and discredit me—for what? Because you say it must be for America, our mother's country. I laugh back at you. You want to sell it outright to Harry Powell. And I tell you this: La Quesada sailed for New York this morning.

The letter was six days old. She laid it aside, her hands chilled at its inner meaning. The mauve-and-silver Pompadour figure over the telephone tempted her by its very air of nonchalance. A moment of indecision, then the thought of a terrified, trapped boy in Paris, turning to her with bitter denunciation in final desperation. She lifted the receiver and gave a number—the Palmer residence. Often she had looked it up and longed to call Talbot, to assure him that she was safe, but some innate caution had held her back. Now she turned to him intuitively, feeling he was the only one who could help her.

Sutton had retired. The buzzer sounded insistently in the lower hallway until it reached Talbot's hearing as he faced a delicate situation in Marion's room. He answered the call impatiently, wondering who could be calling up at that hour of the night. Yotive's voice at the end of the wire, hushed and eager, thrilled him with its soft appeal.

"I must see you to-night," she urged. "It is very urgent, or I would never have called you."

"You did see me, then, at the theater, didn't you?" he demanded, lowering his tone so as to escape Marion's ears. "Where are you now?"

"At a dear friend's home—Mrs. Chilton's on Washington Square North. I must talk with you, M'sieur Tolly."

"I'll come anywhere you say. Which house is it?"

"You cannot come here, but it is so wonderful over in the little park, bright moonlight, and warm and still. There is a court behind the house—what do you call it here, a thoroughfare? No! The Mews, they say. And there is one doorway built deeply into the brick wall, arched, with a small, zigzag tree growing against it, like a Japanese print, you know? I will be there, outside the door, at one o'clock."

"Twenty-two minutes." Talbot glanced at his watch. "All right. I'll make it sooner."

Marion stood in her own doorway, listening with intent, amused eyes. She had changed her evening dress for a negligee of apricot velvet and Chinese-blue embroidery. There was a slight flicker of temper in her manner as she watched Talbot leaving the phone.

"Your vanishing lady?" she asked with a slight drawl. "Rather unfortunate when you were just swearing to me that you had never heard from her, did not know where she was."

"I told you the exact truth," he answered cheerfully. "Believe or not, as you fancy, dear. She vanished, but she's back. I did see her to-night at the theater as I told you, and I'm going to her as fast as I can get there. Good night."

"Give her this for me, Tol." She handed him a small, gold cigarette case. "I found it in the pocket of my black-satin pajamas."

Their eyes met for an instant, know-

ingly, with all the comradeship of years to weld their understanding in a crisis. He laughed as he took it.

"You're great, Marion! I've been rotten to you, but wait till you see her. Courage and nerve and charm plus. Good-by."

He was down the stairs before she could reply. The slam of the street door settled all argument. At the corner of Madison Avenue he caught a drifting taxi.

"Five extra if you make Fifth and Eight in fifteen minutes," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

Cutting between Fifth Avenue and University Place below Eight Street is Washington Mews, a paved alley lined with low, brick stables transformed into studios. The back yards of old-time mansions of the Square have been protected against temperamental invasion by high, red-brick walls. Guarded by tall, wrought-iron gates which are closed at night, the Mews maintains an air of seclusiveness even more effective than its neighbor, Macdougall Alley.

Near its southwestern corner, the even line of tall, red-brick walls was broken at one point by an old sumac tree which upreared hardy boughs, heavy with scarlet leaves, above the wall. Beneath it, the doorway was like an old postern gate, deeply set with rounded top and heavy iron hinges. It was left unlocked at night for milkmen, and Yetive found herself on its Mews side at exactly one o'clock.

She felt stimulated and thrilled over her adventure, at the hour and coming meeting with Talbot. Anne Chilton and her friends still held the front of the house with cards and conversation. While it would have been impossible for her to have passed out that way unobserved, Yetive knew there was no chance of her being seen or missed this way. She had left her room and descended

by the servants' stairway to the basement, thence to the quiet space at the rear of the house, a grass plot boxed by brick paths and shrubbery. Finding the little arched door, she had passed through it, and waited in the stillness for Talbot. Even before she caught a glimpse of him as he turned the corner at Fifth Avenue, Talbot had recognized her in the same dark-green outfit she had worn on shipboard, even to the close little hat over her vivid, piquant little face.

They met with barely a spoken greeting, only the close handclasp, and walked together over into the moonlit silence of the Square. There was a tang of fall coolness in the air. Yetive buried her chin deep into her sable collar, and repented having ever sent for him, he seemed so unconcerned and emotionless. Tall, broad shouldered, with his easy, somewhat lounging gait, he seemed as she had first met him, an extremely well-mannered, well-brought-up young American, handsome in a square-cut, blond style, with steadfast blue eyes and a smile of complete confidence.

Choosing a path that was deserted even by the drifters of the night, he asked finally:

"Well? You sent for me."

"I—needed your advice and help." She hesitated over her words.

"Naturally. Don't imagine for one instant that I thought you wished to see me for your own sake or mine." He lighted a cigarette with uplifted eyebrow, and marked irritation. "I'm only too glad to be of any service to you, you know that. I suppose it's nothing at all to you that I've been half crazy for the past three weeks, thinking of all sorts of horrors that could have happened to you. You might at least have called me up or sent me some word."

"You must stop thinking of yourself, M'sieur Tolly," she protested gravely. "I have sent for you to-night because you are the only friend whom I have

here in New York to whom I can turn for real advice."

She stopped short, seeing the incredulous tolerance in his eyes.

"I presume you are thinking of Mrs. Chilton," she cried, "or of Major Powell. You saw them both with me to-night, and, of course, you think I am lying to you. I swear that she does not know that I am here for any other purpose than to visit her. She was my mother's dearest friend."

"Where does the major come in?" he asked quietly. "He seemed quite within his rights to-night."

"His rights? What do you mean? He—— Why, I have only met him a few times, and it is all business between us. You do not understand. He knows about Lopez and why I am here in America."

"I congratulate him." His tone was even, yet it aroused her anger.

"Must I tell you everything before you will help me? Romlen Rolland, my brother——"

"The boy you were with at the Café Tavary?"

"Of course," she answered quickly. "Did you imagine he was my sweetheart? It would be like you. I think you are very suspicious and stupid, too, M'sieur Tolly. Our father was the great Belgian inventor and scientist, Michel Rolland. He left us plenty of money, but the one treasure of his life was the formula for his last discovery, solium, the perfected concentration of solar energy."

"He discovered this so that it can be handled practically?"

"Surely." Her eyes shone with brilliant intensity in the darkness. "Now you begin to understand. It revolutionizes all motor power. It supplants all that we now use for heat and light. The nation owning it controls the world. And for fear that we might be tempted to sell our own shares unworthily, he divided it into two parts, giving one to

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each of us, Romlen and myself. Neither half is of any value without the other. This man Lopez met my brother in Paris and offered him a fortune for the formula, thinking he controlled it. I refused to give up my share because I know my father's great dream, that it should be used to help humanity, not destroy. La Quesada fascinated Romlen, swept him into the vortex of Parisian night life, and I could do nothing with him."

"That was why you were at the Tavary that night?" Talbot said. "I thought then that you were in trouble."

"It was my last hope, and he laughed at me, told me the whole thing was already done, that he had sold out his share to Lopez, and that he was sailing on the *Caronia*. That was why I followed him, thinking in some way I might get it away from him on the boat, but Captain Bacharach was suspicious of me, and I failed. To-night I found this letter from my brother. You see what he says—that the dancer has left Paris to join Lopez here in New York; that she will have arrived to-day. Unless I can stop her, she will give up Romlen's share of the formula to Lopez."

"But it is useless, you say, without your own half."

"You are so difficult!" She clasped her hands protestingly. "Can't you see that my share also is useless to me without this other? Tell me what I can do?"

"Buy it back from La Quesada. Money is the final equation with a woman of her caliber. I don't know what Lopez is paying her for getting this from your brother, but top or double that price and she will sell out."

"But how can I reach her? Lopez, I think, is at the Ritz——"

"Ambassador," Talbot corrected. "He changed to-day, perhaps expecting the dancer to arrive." He was on the point of telling her of his own encounter

with the South American at the Club Palatine that evening, but checked himself, believing it would merely add to her anxiety.

"Do you think if I were to go myself and see him——"

"I wouldn't do that. He's hardly fit to be on your calling list."

"Don't laugh at me," she pleaded. "I know you're right. If he had known who I was on board ship, he'd probably have had me robbed and tossed to the porpoises."

He reached suddenly for her two hands, holding them fast in his own.

"Do you think I'd laugh at you? Do you know just what it means to me to see you here again to-night when I've wondered if you'd gone out of my life forever? Do you remember what you said to me on the boat—that it was not chance which had brought us together; that there was the unerring, inevitable spark of contact the instant we looked into each other's eyes at the Tavary? You know that is still true, don't you, Yette? Then why haven't you let me know where you were?"

"I was afraid he would try to hurt you, to trace me through you." Her voice was hushed, close against his shoulder.

"But you sent for me to-night!"

"Nobody will know. And it was absolutely necessary for me to have somebody I knew and could trust, who would go to La Quesada for me. There was no one but you, you see. I could never trust Major Powell that far—not when he already suspects Romlen. Listen to me, please, and let me go. I must get back before they miss me. I have found out where this woman stays when she is in New York. Do you know of a place called the Bandolero, down near the west water front? They told me there is a straggling South American neighborhood south of West Fourteenth Street, and it is over there—a restaurant with rooms above. She

is waiting to see Lopez, and they will sail together for the Argentine. You see, it is impossible for me to go to such a place, but you could. I want to know if she is there, and then you must offer her all the money she asks for the formula. I have plenty, m'sieur. I would give up all of my patrimony to save it from Lopez's hands. Will you do this for me?"

"Do you think you need to plead so? Of course I will." His tone was richly reassuring to her keyed-up nerves. "I know the place. I will find out at once."

"Oh, but you will be careful." Her hands reached out impulsively. "I am crazy to send you, and yet I know no other way. Understand, if either Lopez or Bacharach knew of your going, you might not come back alive. You smile, and look like the grand and confident, rich M'sieur Tolly. You think you are here in your own New York, plenty police. Nothing could possibly happen to you." She glanced at her watch—a tiny, flat affair on a black wrist ribbon. "It is almost two—horrible! And if I only dared, I would love to ride and ride all night long until daybreak with you in a low, open car on some road that ended at the edge of the sea."

She sighed wistfully.

"Come!" he whispered eagerly. "I'll get my own car for you."

"Oh, but I think you would at that." She slipped out of his reach, laughing softly. "Even in love, a new driver goes too fast. Good night."

They had strolled back to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Washington Square North. Suddenly the doors of the Chilton residence opened wide, a glow of warm, amber light into the night, and people passing out. Yetive recognized among them the tall figure of Major Powell, distinctive in his cape overcoat. She watched quietly, intently while they entered waiting cars along the curb, and drove away. Her dark eyes sparkled with excitement and hap-

piness as the Powell car passed directly before them.

"It is just as if we wore invisible cloaks," she said. "Good night again, and thank you for coming to me."

"How shall I let you know what happens?"

"Call up, and ask for Miss Trelease. Tell me you have found the article I lost, or not, see? I shall understand. And stay here now, don't walk with me any farther. Good night."

She turned once to wave good-bye again as she passed through the arched green doorway under the upcurved sumac. It was easy to find her way back upstairs to her own room. She breathed a deep sigh of relief as she removed her street garments, and slipped into a lounging robe of piña cloth from Manila, the color of ripe pomegranate seeds. Its straight, close-fitting lines suited her slender, boyish figure. Bare, slim feet into sandals to match, and she curled herself up on a corner of the couch, smoking with deep, slow, dreamy inhalations.

Everything would be safe, now, she thought. Talbot would easily persuade the dancer to sell out to him. She knew that La Quesada was reputed to be avaricious and conscienceless where men were concerned. She would not hesitate to deceive Lopez if it were greatly to her own interests.

A few days more, and she would have the Rolland formula in full to deliver into Major Powell's hands. Nothing would happen to Romlen. They would not dare attempt anything openly. As for Serafin Lopez—she smiled slowly to herself. This terrible, ruthless evil genius whom men and women feared for his secret power! To her he was merely the very handsome, debonair young South American who had lavished admiration and attentions upon her during her recent sea voyage from France.

Instead, it was the memory of La

Quesada's face that held the greatest menace to Yotive, the arched, accentuated black eyebrows, enormous, roving eyes, white face with scarlet, full lips, all the brooding, careless strength of her. And she herself had dared to send the man she loved to win over this woman who was known as the most notorious and successful of her type in two continents. The cigarette in her hand burned away to a long ash.

"I'm not afraid," she repeated to her-

self over and over. "Not at all afraid." Yet as she lay there, vividly she visualized their meeting, the dancer's reception of the offer, everything that she might do. Not until that moment had the truth concerning her own feelings toward Talbot dawned upon her. Now she realized that, in the last analysis, nothing—neither Romlen's honor, nor even the Rolland formula—could compensate her if anything happened to Talbot Palmer.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



"AMERICAN girls do not ruin skin or hair with cosmetics," declared Jean Patou, the French designer, after his recent trip to America. Surely our women must have a deft touch to deceive such a keen observer.



A MONUMENT of discomfort was the elaborate bed belonging to the Shah of Persia. Made entirely of crystal and surmounted by a chandelier, the bed held automatic fountains whose splashings lulled to sleep—if that was possible—the uneasy head that wore a crown.



THE doctor who claims that fasting renews youthful conditions isn't likely to have a horde of followers. His experiments prove that a fifteen-day fast increases the ability of the bodily tissues to absorb nutriment and produce energy, increases the supply of gastric juices, and improves digestion. But who wants to fast fifteen days?



TROUSERS are too modest for women, and not nearly so revealing as skirts, thinks the fashion dictator of Paris. He proves his point by citing the Oriental races who conceal their women in trousers, since they are less enticing than skirts. Trousers will not become popular unless they be short ones; for women are vain of their silken-sheathed ankles and will not conceal them. In fact women are adopting ankle corsets to reduce thick ankles to the slender proportions of a race horse's.



PERHAPS it was a form of poetic license that Longfellow practiced when he misrepresented the political situation in "Evangeline;" ignored the Indian lore in "Hiawatha;" and had no basis in fact for the "Skeleton in Armor." It now develops that even his wrecking of the schooner *Hesperus* for poetically dramatic purposes was pure fiction. Although there was a schooner *Hesperus*, and a reef called "Norman's Woe," that schooner was safe in harbor during the great storm of which the poet writes, and was neither then, nor at any other time, wrecked. But who would bridle a poet's imagination, if he could?



Tee for Two

By Clement Wood

Author of "The Cobra," etc.

BUT I haven't the slightest intention of marrying you or anybody else, Barney." Polly Inge smiled regretfully, as she stooped to adjust her ball a trifle lower upon its deft tee. "Wait, now, till I drive off."

It was the long, easy twelfth of the Haddon Beach course—two good drives down a smooth, wide fairway, a pitch to the raised green, and one putt, or at most two, for an obvious four or five. Polly averaged a four on it. Should less be expected of the women's State champion of Connecticut?

But Barney Webb's insistent, whispered proposal, especially with the others so near, had plainly flurried her taut nerves. She achieved the impossible, for her, and sliced the ball wickedly into a hemlock thicket far to the right.

Doctor McGurk, who never sliced, never hooked, and never did anything else but drive firmly and precisely down the middle of the going for an unimpressive and yet deadly distance, made a slight "Tchk!" with his tongue. And this was an unusual display of emotion for him. With lovely Miss Inge for his partner, he had expected an easy victory over the other pair—Barney Webb, who rarely veered down into the seventies, and the doctor's wife, a muscular, steady player, but one by no means in his partner's class.

"Too bad, my dear," cooed Mrs. McGurk, with an unhinted overtone of womanly satisfaction. After an ad-

dress annoyingly slow, she lifted her ball for an unusually clean get-away, as if to give point to the champion's failure.

"All in the game"—Polly spoke sweetly, lifting her topaz eyes to smile through the other woman; then she said aside to Barney, as the doctor prepared himself meticulously for his own drive—"of love—or, shall I say, marriage? Driving into the rough—and staying there."

Barney did not answer her until he had seen the doctor's white pill end its low trajectory, and bounce and roll a clean additional fifty yards toward the distant green. Morosely he adjusted his own ball, and, as if by diabolic premeditation, sent it off on a screaming slice into the same thicket that Polly's ball had found.

He did not grin at her, until the two of them had set out together toward the trees, and the two partners were off down the fairway.

"Love isn't only the rough," he objected, not quite convinced. So far, his pursuit of Polly had been—no doubt of that.

She retorted:

"Think of them yourself, Barney—all the young married people we know—all the married people we know. Any of 'em happy? Really happy, I mean?"

"But because other people have made a mess—"

"Or tried a course that's all rough, Barney. Bunkers of incompatibility,

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sand pits of jealousy—I could preach a Rotarian sermon on it.”

She quieted, to watch him address his ball. He could have tried the easy lift back to the fairway. Instead, he ventured the brassie, aiming with clenched lips down a long aisle of green, with the danger of hitting any of a number of tree boles or branches, that would have bounced his ball forever into the bottomless pit of lost balls. A full-armed swing, a clean crack, and the tiny white globe spun up out of the shadows into the sunlight above the trees, sailing triumphantly to a good lie in the midst of the course, admirably close to the green.

“One doesn’t have to stay in the rough.” He pointed a moral with a restrained smile.

“In golf,” she corrected sweetly. Smiling demurely, she tried the easier way, and pitched for less distance but much more safety. They walked together out of the shadows into the sun glitter of the course.

“If I marry a man, it’ll have to be a golfer,” she began argumentatively.

“I’m rather a dub——”

She shook away the apologetic plea.

“And an archangel, a cave man—what girl fails to think she wants one?—a tea-dance expert, Claridge speed, an artist, a Republican whose brain’s dyed in the wool or something equally ante-bellum, and a vigorous radical. That’s all.”

“That’s your ball,” he said distantly; then, shaping the apt rejoinder: “Mrs. Solomon.”

“What woman would really be satisfied with less?”

“Mrs. Bernard Webb would have to be,” he groaned bitterly. “If you think I’m a combination of Coolidge, Trotzky, Valentino, Doctor Frank Crane, and Bobby Jones——”

“I think you’re adorable, Barney, when you pout like that,” she laughed.

“If I marry a girl, there’s only one

thing I insist upon.” His face grew suddenly tantalizingly serious.

“And that is——” Her soft, topaz eyes, impressed by his tone, over-matched his tenderness.

“Her name must be Polly Inge,” he gloated with dancing eyes. “Doctor’s waving at you madly, dear. Better shoot, or that twosome behind us——”

Well, he had gotten somewhere, he reflected that night, as he mulled over the conversation. At least, she had not turned him down cold; she had only turned marriage down—marriage in the abstract. Cave man, angel, beggar man, thief, golfer, artist, Republican chief—good heavens, what an order! There was a novel, or something, called “The Man With the Thousand Faces.” He must look it up; there might be a hint or two in it.

The match had resulted in an easy victory for the doctor and his champion partner. Polly had insisted on leaving it somewhat vague as to whether or not she would go around with Barney the next afternoon. He went out for his dip the following morning, confident that the golfing queen would be somewhere along the beach. He could win her “yes” to the plan for the afternoon, anyhow; that would be something, he comforted himself.

At first, he caught no sight of her. And then he spied her, reclining lazily in the bow of a canoe that was driven with steady strokes through the snarling combers, by a muscular figure in dark green. After a thoughtful scrutiny, Barney decided that it must be a professional; no one else could keep her steady in such choppy water. Perhaps a beach guard, or an instructor.

As Barney was sunning himself after a discreet dip, they came riding in at last, slicing the water and then the shore sand with all the air of a car of juggernaut triumphant over prostrate worshippers. The man swung out, and gave the girl a hand. When she rose

dreamily to her feet, there was Barney owling at her.

"Oh, Barney, this is Mr. Vachell—Tod Vachell, you know."

The two men shook hands, Barney wincing a trifle at the lumberman's grip of the fist.

"You know, Mr. Vachell has just come from the Mid-westerns," she breezed away. "Preliminary medalist, and champion."

"Oh!" said Barney helplessly.

"He's to be in the club championship next week. Perhaps you two will meet," she continued wickedly.

"You golf?" asked Vachell, with just the hint of a supercilious lift of his brows.

"Rather a dub"—a humility half mocking!

"Well, it's not your fault, Barney; you try hard enough." She encouraged him with this dash of cold frankness. "Just think, Mr. Vachell's taking me on for a twosome this afternoon, to polish up my game!"

"That's fine," he lied easily. Gone, gone, the hope of an immediate siege of her second wall of defenses.

"You've got the build," Vachell granted her, with an admiring scrutiny. "I'll be glad to give you a pointer or two."

"Better not," she bantered lightly. "You know, the men's champion meets the winner in our class, for the club cup. One year a woman won, too!"

"Miss Inge was the woman," explained Barney carefully. "Last year was the first year she competed."

"You don't say!" marveled Vachell.

Barney Webb tried in vain to discover a withering retort. As he stared, tongue-tied, at the retreating backs of the others, he meditated on the various circumstances when homicide is legally justifiable.

Well, he had almost a week before the tournament to patch up his game somehow. For he had already given his

name in to the committee, and all the Tod Vachells in the world would not make him back out. It would be just his luck, at that, to meet those supercilious eyebrows in the first round, and sag down to ignominious defeat.

Nothing like stealing a march, however. He routed out Harry Bryce, the club professional, for a round that very afternoon.

Of course, it was just his luck again—no sooner had he found his preliminary stance for the drive-off at the first tee, than up sauntered Polly and that talky golf sheik. If he had only driven off five minutes earlier!

"How do, Webb?" granted Vachell easily. "Let's see how you swing."

He'd get an eyeful, Barney decided savagely within himself. He took two preliminary swishes, with absolute form. Putting a good deal less than all of himself into the swing, he met the ball honestly, and sent it whistling off for a good two hundred yards.

"Nice drive," said Vachell, with almost a touch of enthusiasm in his voice. "Very nice. You hooked just the merest trifle, of course. How d'you hold your hands? Lemme see! Ah, I thought so. A little closer together. You can improve that stance, too. But very nice."

"It's a wonderful afternoon, isn't it?" asked Barney innocently. As the professional drove off without a word, the two of them walked toward the second green together. "Nice drive, very nice," mimicked Barney despondently. "It would have been all right, if only he'd made it, eh, Harry?"

"Some men play golf with their tongue," said Bryce cannily. "That Vachell ain't no world beater, either, Mr. Webb. Long as he's ahead, he's rolling pretty. I've seen him. But he cracks like cheap plaster at the first break in the luck, and then—good night!"

"Teach me how to crack him, Harry,

and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you!"

Under the eagle glare of the professional, Barney went the eighteen in a surprisingly good seventy-seven. Good, though hardly good enough to get very far toward the cup.

"I'll take you to-morrow morning at seven," said Bryce decidedly. "Before them dame chasers are out. Maybe we can make something out of you yet."

There was some hope, anyhow.

Less than a week before the tournament! And more and more, as the depressing days passed, and Tod Vachell clung as close to the lady as a field burr upon a woolen skirt, Barney began to realize that this tournament held more significance for him than all the cups in the world. If Vachell won this, as he seemed sure to do, it would somehow symbolize winning the larger game, for all three of them knew insensibly that the rivalry between the men extended to more than the links. And Vachell was already regarded as a champion. Cave man, angel, statesman, thief—Barney considered the order speculatively.

He tried being a cave man Saturday night, the occasion of the big club dance. Polly sat out at ease on the porch, surrounded by the ubiquitous Tod Vachell, by Dick Grosvenor, another crack-ajack golfer, and by many more. Barney Webb was something in the background.

He put in his oar at last.

No, Polly did not care to dance. She was sure of it.

Exhilarated by a rebuke that Vachell had earned for some more egotistic boast than usual, Barney told the girl to come ahead.

No, she did not care to dance.

Of course she did—he put as much cave man as he could in his voice. He even hinted gracefully that he would carry her off to the floor willy-nilly.

Would he kindly run along, and stop bothering her?

It was not unkind as she said it; as Vachell repeated it, it was a steed of a different hue. Bitterly peeved at himself, Barney took himself off, and did not show up the rest of the evening.

Angel! It was proposed Sunday night to take in the Dew Drop Inn, whose innocuous name concealed a reputation as hotly crimson as a Turner sunset. It wasn't just the place to go, Barney urged, the more fervently since Vachell was the main instigator of the jaunt. The party went to the Dew Drop Inn, minus Mr. Bernard Webb, who somehow had unskillfully squeezed himself out.

What did the lady want, anyhow?

Statesman—his career in this rôle was brief. Unluckily, at lunch, some one mentioned the fall of the franc. Barney, who knew as much as the average newspaper editor about the finances of France, expressed a dogmatic opinion on the tricky subject.

Whereupon Mr. Tod Vachell stepped into the theme. He was almost at once the camel inside the tent—there was nothing he did not know about it, Barney gathered out of the mental haze that came of endeavoring to follow Vachell's lucid explanations. He had met Herriot; he knew a cousin of De Monzie's; he discoursed learnedly of the effect on the Bourse of famine in Bessarabia, Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, and the upper murals within the tomb of Tut-ankh-amen's father. Or so it seemed to Barney, as he tried to keep his head somehow above the inundation of statistics and confidential information that Vachell emitted.

No, certainly not statesman.

Golfer remained. And, with no hope in the world, he threw himself into the tournament, which started Monday afternoon, with the determination to go down, at least, with all his banners flying.

The draw was kind to him. Vachell and Grosvenor were both in the lower

half; the worst he had to face in the upper was Doctor McGurk. A bye for the first round, he was first paired against Larry Cooper, one of the few local members whom he always beat.

He teed off about four, and smashed along in vastly improved style for a victory of three up and two to go. Unfortunately for his glory, Vachell had taken on a much harder opponent, and had done far better.

Barney's third-round match was an easy one, but his next opponent was McGurk. Under average conditions, he could not have touched the doctor's game. But it sprinkled most of the night before, and the course the next morning was as dry as the Dismal Swamp in a damp spring. McGurk went pecking away at his accurate little shots, sadly embarrassed by the mud; Barney whaled away at the pill as if the fate of the League of Nations hung on every drive. It was distance and strength against muddy skill, and distance and strength won.

Why, with the easy semifinal opponent disposed of, he might actually meet Vachell or Grosvenor in the finals!

That afternoon, the course had dried appreciably; and Barney made one of the banner gallery that followed the main match so far of the meet—Vachell against Grosvenor. It was a heart-stopping, seesawing match all the way along, for Grosvenor was a magnificent golfer. Barney stood near enough to study Vachell's technique. He soon found that it consisted of more than excellent golf: it included also a mean line of subdued chatter, calculated to break the nerve of the best golfer in the world. All subtle, all deferential, all permissible—but still mean. It did not so much break Grosvenor's iron nerve, as disgust him with the contest. Vachell scored the victory, two up and one to go.

So, after one more victory apiece, it was Webb and Vachell for the finals.

Meanwhile, Polly Inge had mowed down her slight opposition like an oiled mower over a May clover lawn. Webb confessed ruefully to himself that it looked dangerously like Vachell and Miss Inge for the cup meeting.

The morning of the two finals dawned perfect golfing weather. Webb smiled sadly to himself that he had the main gallery at last, due to the weakness of the upper half of the unseeded draw, and more to his opponent's skill and popularity. Only one thing occurred to strengthen his nerve. As he walked out of the clubhouse, his skin alternately washed by waves of chill and undue warmth, Harry Bryce stopped him.

"Some men play golf with their tongue," he repeated significantly.

This strange benison cheered Barney up immeasurably. Of course, there was Polly among the spectators; and everybody else, for that matter. Well, here he was; this would be no walkover, anyhow.

It was his honor. Nervously he adjusted a glittering new ball on the tee, and stared in fascination at the symbol that would have to mark his hardest fight. He took two careful practice swings—the second one missing the aimed-for spot by three inches. Then, ordering his nerves to stand by him like bands of steel, he drove off—a fine, clean, low shot of full two hundred yards, with an energetic bounce to it that added almost half of this distance on the roll.

"Nice drive," purred Vachell, with a deprecatory enthusiasm in his voice. "Very nice. You sliced just the merest trifle, of course. Better hold those hands closer together. And watch that stance. But—very nice."

Barney saw crimson. So that was what the other man would treat him to, was it? Suddenly it flashed over him—the answer he must make to this. He stared at the other's professional ease, as he went off with a carry that did

much better in the air, although not quite so well on the ground.

As they started walking together toward the distant balls, Barney kept his voice as silkily soft as the other's had been.

"Pretty drive," he purred guilelessly. "Very pretty. You hooked a bit, of course. And weren't your hands too close together? Better spread 'em out a bit. Your follow-through was cramped, too. But—very pretty."

Vachell looked at him in quick suspicion.

"My style has been praised by the best professionals in America, Webb," he grunted superciliously. "I can't imagine what you mean."

"I spoke very clearly," said Barney, voice softer, savage gloating inside. "A pretty drive—very pretty. You hooked a bit——"

Word for word he repeated it.

"Nonsense," said Vachell. He scowled, like a man troubled by an irritating buzzing hard to locate.

The two balls lay side by side, with Barney's a scant two inches ahead. Vachell said nothing, as he used a mid-iron for an approach that was just a trifle too gentle; and Barney said nothing, for all that he noticed the other's trouble. His own choice was a brassie. This carried the ball a trifle above the green, with a happy roll that put it to sleep on the green itself, hardly twelve feet from the cup.

Again Vachell said nothing. Barney said not a word, and won the hole by a clean putt, three to four.

Vachell looked at his opponent suspiciously. Was this dub really a crack shot in disguise?

Barney let it go at a look.

At Barney's second drive-off, there came another comment, a little more acidulous this time, from the supercilious eyebrows. Barney waited until the other man had driven off, then, as

guilelessly as possible, gave him another dose of the same untasty tonic.

Hotly Vachell defended his shot and his technique. With merciless meticulousness Barney parodied the criticism a second time, and, at Vachell's "Nonsense!" uttered it a third time, thoughtfully, judicially. Wonder of wonders, he won the second hole with a shot to spare.

At this, Vachell took command of himself, and began shooting in his expected form. It was enough to equal the strangely confident game that Barney was playing, although hardly more than this. The next two holes were halved; the pair following were won by the visitor by close golf; at the seventh hole they were equal. Again Vachell essayed to comment deprecatingly on Barney's game; word for savage, silky word, Barney retaliated. They were even at the tenth again; they were even at the fourteenth; they were even at the seventeenth.

The gallery was awed at the brand of golf that both men were playing. Harry Bryce, remembering his careful coaching of the last week, nodded with grim satisfaction. To the rest, it was the encounter between an unexpected miracle opposed to an invincible machine.

Eighteenth hole—with the prospect of extra ones needed to settle.

There might have been one or more extra holes, if Vachell had been wise enough to restrain his comments. But, on Barney's second shot, a clean brassie with as much distance as his fine, opening drive, the other man could not restrain his tongue tactics. He commented casually on a few of Barney's faults and stance and hold.

Even before he shot, Barney began talking, in a whisper so quiet that the other man had to lean toward him to get the words.

"Vachell," he began, "you are beyond question the saddest golfer I ever played

against. I know now how you won whatever you have won—it's been by your catty chatter, running down the games of men who could entirely outplay you, if you kept your tongue still. Your form is fair, and nothing better; you stand wrong, grip wrong, and think wrong. But your talk's a disgrace. Go on and do your best—it won't be good enough. You can't win this hole—you aren't man enough to." All in a whisper, soft as a leaf overturned by a dying wind. "You're what men call a bum sport—the sort of man that has more than his arm up his sleeve in poker, get me? Your extra ace is your tongue. I've got one, too. You're a bluff through and through, and as much of a bully as you dare to be. A bluff, from the word go. Now shoot your darnedest—I've got your number. I call your bluff. Lay down your pair of treys. Go on and break—you're through. T-h-r-o-u-g-h, through! Get it?"

The intense whisper died terribly away. Vachell, his face crimson with shame, for fear some one had overheard, drove his brassie into the turf; his ball dribbled a couple of yards, and lay mocking him. Again he addressed himself, and this time made a feeble thirty yards into a sand pit. It took him three to get out. He picked up his ball and bowed, granting the hole and the match.

While the gallery swung joyfully around the winner, the loser fell in beside Polly Inge, smilingly in command of himself again.

"Couldn't make it," he confessed in lofty condescension. "I'm running a raging fever now—fighting off an attack of laryngitis. I thought I'd last it out—"

To his amazement, he found that he was walking alone. Somehow the girl had slipped between two others of the crowd, and in a few minutes joined Barney Webb.

"I'm glad you won, Barney," she said quietly. "But the man was sick."

"I made him sick. He deserved it." The words were for her ear alone.

"How utterly ridiculous! I could see something was wrong with him, after the first hole."

"I was what was wrong with him," he insisted with quiet stubbornness.

"You're overwrought, Barney. Anyhow, I'm glad you won the match." She smiled a far-away smile. "You see, you'll have to face me to-morrow."

"Good heavens, Polly, I'll default!"

"Why, Barney!"

"I never could beat you."

"The way you've been playing—You beat Tod, didn't you?"

So it was Tod, he reflected savagely. Maybe, after all, he had not beaten the man.

A long talk with Harry Bryce, at sunup, put him in the hard mood he needed for the final session.

One remark of Polly Inge's broke all this down.

"I'll give you your answer—to that question you asked me a week ago—after this match, Barney boy," she said softly. "You've done mighty well so far."

There was no time for anything more. He had to build everything out of that remark.

What did the girl mean?

She had won one leg on the cup; victory now would mean a second one. Over and over she had told him that golf meant everything in the world to her. She had intended beating Vachell, or any man who came through. She intended beating him—and then, perhaps, saying: "Yes" to him, as a consolation prize.

But he didn't believe she could beat him, after all! If he shot as carefully as he had been shooting, he almost matched her game; and when you added the extra distance his drive had always carried, why, she just simply couldn't!

And then—what would her answer be?

Could she ever say: "Yes," to the man who beat her, and kept her from that second leg on the cup she wanted so, and—considering the fact that she was a woman and all—that she was entitled to?

He tried to get his head clear of all this for his first drive. It remained a muddle. For the first time in a week, his form broke to pieces. Instead of the good, straight drive that every one anticipated, it was a dubby slice into a particularly mean rough. Well, she ought to have no trouble in beating that, he thought ruefully.

Nor did she. Off clean as a rain-washed birch, she lay gleaming far down the fairway, while his ball, on his savage mashie shot, ricocheted from a stone back into the rough. It took him four to get his ball's nose a bit ahead of hers. He played it through. The first hole went to her by a margin of three strokes.

He could not decide what, in her heart of hearts, she wanted him to do today. Moiled in this perplexity, he lost the second and fourth holes, halving the third. Neither had said a word more. He finished the ninth, with his opponent four up on him.

"What's the matter with your game, Barney?" she marveled, in quiet friendliness, as they sauntered over to the tenth tee.

"You," he said, with bitter frankness.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"You said—after this match——"

"You don't mean you've laid down?"

"I don't know what I've done, Polly. I can think of nothing but you—whether I ought to win this dratted match or not, to win you. What's a golf cup, compared to you? I'd give a thousand dollars— Oh, I——"

"Good heavens, Barney Webb! Do

you think I could marry a man who couldn't beat me at this game? I was banking on you to beat me," she whispered softly.

"Will you marry me if I beat you?" he asked with savage eagerness.

She smiled a perverse, adorable little smile, and let the topaz eyes dwell in his.

"Do you think I'd marry a man who won this cup I'm so crazy for?"

He stared at her, his brain refusing to straighten this out. Something broke through.

"Then I lose—either way?"

"Maybe you win either way," she taunted cryptically. "Maybe marriage would mean we both lose."

He digested this with tense anger. So she was just playing with him, after all!

And here he had let himself fool along, far below his best golf—not intentionally, of course, but all muddled mentally. Why, he couldn't keep this up! Polly or no Polly, man or woman, there was something bigger to this than his own schemes for happiness. Something swept down over him, like a wind from high mountains, lifting his heart, making him strangely certain and aloof. The spirit of golf suddenly found the entrance it had been seeking.

It was the game, after all, he must play—a gentleman's game—a man's game. A man did his best in golf, as in life, or he was a quitter. Nothing excused anything less. He had been all wrong. He had no right to think of anything else in the world, but holding himself tight for his best effort. He had no right to consider outside relationships. He would win this match! Then the state of the score suddenly cooled his ardor. Well, if he could not win the match now, he could do his darnedest anyhow. He could not do less. It was not Polly he was playing against, but his own weakness—his own muddle-headed cracking under a nervous strain. From now on, he was

through with this baby business; he would play like a man.

As well as a man could, he put his opponent entirely out of his mind. The girl drove off brilliantly. He tried to make himself drive off properly. Over-zeal tricked him again; he put too much into his arms, dug a bit below the tee, sent the ball too high, with a hook, too. It rolled to the edge of the fairway, and seemed bound for the rough. It stopped just in time. He was out of line, but still had a little edge in distance on the girl.

He addressed the ball with bleak aloofness, master of himself for the first time during the day. It was the brassie this time—a drive that bested the girl's effort by fifty yards. Contrary to all decorum, he got a hand from the gallery for it. Some of them, at least, may have guessed what he was going through.

Polly Inge was not whipped yet, by four up and all of her shrewdness. A crafty iron sent her floating to the rim of the green; his mashie could do little better. The hole was halved. She was four up, with eight to go.

It was still her honor; but, he decided fiercely, it would be her honor for the last time. He could play as accurate, as steady a game as she, and with more distance on every drive. He did. He won the eleventh, the thirteenth, the tricky fourteenth, halving the other two. He stood at the sixteenth one down and three to go.

The next hole was comparatively short; his long driving was of no aid. Playing with uncanny accuracy, she made it in a beautiful three. It looked like a sure two up.

But he had been the certain man of steel he had been all the week, as he drove cleanly over the water hazard, lifted to the green, and sank his own long putt for another half. One down, two to go! He was no longer playing against the girl; he was playing against

the abstract opposition of the links—the spirit of defeat planted in the game itself by its wise designers. He was pitted against nature, against an unseen opponent that demanded that fraction more than his best that man, as man, achieves in his peak moments. He told himself that he could not possibly lose.

It was his honor, and the seventeenth was a long, zigzag hole. It was a mean opening drive over two bunkers; he lifted both of them. The best that Polly could do was to clear the first, and bump along to the base of the second. After her second shot, he took a second to lie just below the green. She was hardly up to him with her fourth. A deft mashie, then, putting with superb self-control, he ran down the ball for a four. They were even, with one to go!

"I didn't think you could do it," she murmured quietly to him. He could hardly bring himself to recall her, so far out of his mind he had put her. And for his life he could not have told what she meant. He refused to consider it.

The gallery was evenly divided, now—the women all for the magnificent uphill game he was playing, the men chivalrously siding with the splendid shooting of the girl.

His second hard match, tied again at the seventeenth!

He forgot the girl completely, and thought only of the task of the game. A man must do his best; that was always enough, if not to win, at least to win the harder struggle of making the most of what lay before him. He did his best—off like a rifle bullet. Her drive came to rest forty yards behind his. Her second shot, a fine brassie, carried almost as much distance as his best; but no more. As he drove up from the fairway, for a moment his heart turned sick—the ball had a definite slice, a bend toward the treacherous right that might take it into the heart

of the nastiest rough along the whole course.

A fluke of wind, added to its own spin, and its salvation. It hesitated in air, started falling more and more to the left, and struck turf well within the cleared space. There was another decorous hand at this—man was again defeating the elements!

They were on the green in four apiece; he lay a few feet away, a fifteen-foot putt. He knew that he would make it; and he made it. She addressed her ball for the final putt, hardly doubting but that the match meant an extra hole. The stars in their courses were not visible, but the lay of the hillside was against her. Her ball missed the rim by a scant two inches, and came to rest a foot away.

The incredible had happened.

Barney Webb had won the match and the cup, on the last hole!

At the moment that he realized this, and let thought of the girl flood over his mind again, he knew with sickening certainty that he had lost more than a thousand matches.

"Splendidly played, Barney," she was saying, gripping his hand. As he feared, there was a strained little catch in her voice.

"You're the better golfer," he objected abjectedly.

"Yes," she whispered. And then again, after a pause, "I said 'Yes,' Barney."

"I—I knew you were," he fumbled, suddenly upset at her tone—at some-

thing strange and surcharged with meaning in it.

Somehow the gallery, stilled by their intensity, held away.

"Don't you understand, boy? To your question—yes," she whispered.

And then he understood. He stood trembling, unable to speak. It was more than any one had a right to dream.

"You mean—yes?" he tested aloud, not believing what his heart already knew.

This time she bowed. The day was golden above both of them.

"Polly, Polly, I was sure I had lost!"

"No matter what had come, boy, I knew you would win," she confessed tantalizingly.

"Dub that I was—at this game!"

"No, champion," she corrected prettily.

"Polly"—his eyes lighted with shy charm—"we'll name our home 'Out of the Rough,' won't we, old girl?"

She squeezed his hand, oblivious of all the spectators in the world.

"What about my name for it, Barney—"Tee for Two?"

"Marvelous! Only—isn't a tee where you drive off from?" he queried mischievously.

"It's where everything lovely begins, boy. But you really like it—the name? Think it fits?"

"Temporarily," he grudged, with a sudden, bright glance.

The gallery ringed them both at this. But why should the loser be blushing, and look so idiotically happy?



THE recent revival of Congreve's "Love for Love" in New York brings to light the workings of an enterprising clipping bureau which wrote to "My dear Mr. Congreve," reminding him that they would supply him with interesting newspaper clippings of his play at so and so much, et cetera. To a live business firm nothing is impossible.

WHEN NIGHT WOODED PLEASURE

By CORA GOULD

THE spot was ideal that they chose
 To dine, on edge of river Seine,
 Just as the silver moon arose,
 To set æsthetic souls aflame.
 Orm ordered with a nicety
 At hostelry hid under vines—
 Americans 'twas plain to see,
 Who had a penchant for good wines.

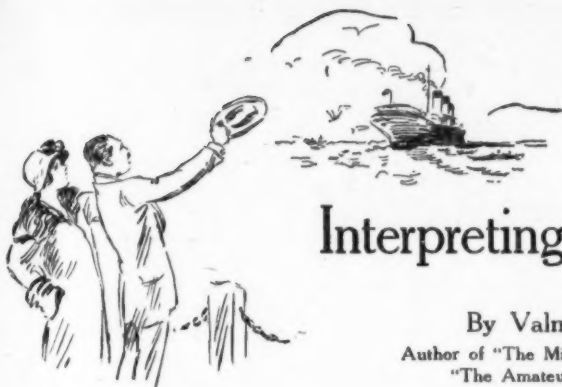
The amber cocktails shed their light,
 And how the witty bon mots flew!
 The New York boys were out this night,
 To share their joys with Alma, too.
 Then with keen, observant eye,
 The *sommelier* with much ado
 Placed on the table with a sigh,
 A bottle in conspicuous view.

'Twas coated with a pasty clay
 And wore a seal to prove its age;
 Anticipation had full play
 Before *le potage* took the stage.
La sole then tempted with white wine,
Le poulet took its destined place,
 The *mise en scène*, all but divine,
 Reflected joy in Alma's face.

"And now to taste the burgundy,"
 Said Orm, "and drink the health of France."
 He raised his glass to "*ses amis*,"
 Who drained the nectar at his glance,
 Then rhapsodised. Their lips were wet
 With rich red wine, and after that,
 They all made love to *amourette*,
 And sipped it, dreaming, where they sat.

June roses added to their bliss,
 The silver moon had turned to gold.
 And what a heavenly night was this!
 George claimed the charm could not be told.
 Meanwhile the stars dipped in the Seine,
 And laughter rode upon the breeze,
 While Billy hummed a soft refrain,
 As night wooed pleasure 'neath the trees.

—From the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune.



Interpreting Edwina

By Valma Clark

Author of "The Middle of the Tale,"
"The Amateur Child," etc.

OUR acquaintance began abruptly on the dock at Monaco.

"Hello, you're Hester Pratt."

I stared.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Blakely told us about you."

"Oh, you are Miss Edwina McIver? Mrs. Blakely wrote me—I'm awfully glad— Do you know, have I enough kinds of labels on this trunk?"

"Couldn't say. Mother's fussin' now; after she gets through fussin', I'll go and do it. There's heaps of time—boat doesn't sail till noon. Let's sit down; don't know whose trunk it is, and don't care." She took possession of most of the only low trunk in the vicinity, leaving me a seat too narrow for comfort, hunched up her long legs, hooked her arms about her knees, and stared gloomily, her mouth pushed out, at a sea that held, in the sun-saturated blue of its water, the white of gulls, of a sail, of the fresh-painted ocean liner anchored out, all the brilliant, transient beauty of a Riviera morning—a beauty it fairly made your heart ache to leave for the dregs of a New York winter.

"It's nice for me," I tried, "running into——"

"Yes. You're alone, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't look exciting—the prospect."

I ran my eye over the group.

"Two professors and one professor's wife, three school teachers, a priest, five middle-aged-to-elderly globe trotters," I inventoried. "No, January's the wrong time to be heading for New Yo——"

"There's dirt on your nose. Did you get your suit in Paris? You-all smoke? Got a cigarette?"

"Sorry!"

"You're the youngest one here; you'll eat at our table." She finished her survey of me and disposed of me in the space of one frown. She relapsed into gloom.

I was in process of sizing her up—the raw, long body; the small, white face, freckled faintly, pink-lidded, with its straight, rather delicate nose, its wide mouth, its high cheek bones—when I became aware of a little brown, jaunty woman who sauntered up without haste and whose blue eyes doted, half-humorously, upon the figure which I appraised so coldly. Her indulgence included all the details: small purple-silk hat, squashed down, purple scarf which trailed the dock, beige-colored silken knee, purple cut-leather sandals. Edwina's mother did not say, "Edwina, your scarf's in the dust," or, "Edwina, pull down your skirt." Instead, she looked down upon her daughter as a

lover might gaze upon an enchanting and absurd little sweetheart, and said:

"I've got everything tagged but the canvas suit case and I can't find that."

"Mother!"

"It will turn up," predicted Mrs. McIver easily.

"It's got my new green dress," scowled Edwina. "Oh, nev' mind, I'll tend to it myself."

"Perhaps you'd better, dear."

"S Hester—Hester Pratt," Edwina remembered.

Mrs. McIver's smile admitted me to the joke of an efficient daughter. She had a rusty little face—weathered brown, stained deep with freckles, from forty-some-odd years of grubbing in her South Carolina flower garden, I learned later; her nose was pert and her smile was merry. "You'll be company for Ed——"

"Hot—I can't *bear* bein' hot!" fumed Edwina.

"You can cool yourself by just looking at the water," suggested Mrs. McIver. "Did you ever see such blues and such greens—that exquisite *soaped* green?" She tilted the pert nose as though to sniff the green. "The color, Edwina, of your new——"

"Cigarette," Edwina fretted. "If only——" She caught an aroma, turned. He was a short, thick, middle-aged man, clearly an American, and in spite of slouch clothes and a plaid cap, or perhaps because of his two brief cases and a restless gesture with a paper-thin gold watch, he looked like a person of importance. Edwina hesitated not an instant; she smiled, and I discovered her blue, blue eyes, with the fringe of black lashes as sharp and lustrous as bits of shining black enamel stuck there. "Got an extra one? Cigarette?"

"Eh? Oh, certainly—sure thing." He deposited the two brief cases, produced a flat, gold cigarette case, struck a match for Edwina.

I waited for Mrs. McIver's protest, which did not come.

Edwina continued to smile, but suddenly her smile had shifted from the American and focused in the general direction of Monte Carlo behind his back. There was an awkward moment; Edwina had completely forgotten to thank him.

The thick-set gentleman, who still had the open cigarette case in his hand, turned to Mrs. McIver.

"Will you——" He hesitated.

"Thank you, Edwina doesn't allow me. Edwina"—she sparkled—"can't bear silliness in the old."

His black eyes, behind their really delightful twinkle, held a shrewdness; the full curve of his nose hinted at a Jewish strain.

"The old?" he deprecated.

"You know"—she rushed in her soft, slurring speech into one of the little anecdotes which were flung across the gap of so many of Edwina's discourtesies—"I once made a fearful break. Edwina and some of the little gals back home were goin' for a moonlight ride——"

"That old one!" groaned Edwina.

"And I wanted to go along. Edwina forbade it, and I argued. Nancy——"

"Mother, keep your voice down," Edwina admonished.

"Nancy—she's my elder daughter—finally enlightened me. 'They don't want you, mother, because they want to smoke.'"

"'Let them smoke away,' I retorted; 'I don't mind!'"

"Well, Edwina here simply went to pieces. 'It's what I can't bear, that you, a mother, should countenance smoking!'"

Mrs. McIver's brownie face was all puckered with the fun of it; I looked at her and grinned; our dock acquaintance looked at her and chuckled.

Edwina herself lifted starry blue eyes; murmured vaguely:

"You do see how it would make you feel, with the other gals——"

Again Edwina's attention was riveted; I turned, and found, very much this side of Monte Carlo, the object of her vivid interest in the shape of a trim, personable young man. He was scanning trunks. He discovered the trunk on which Edwina sat without discovering Edwina.

"Here it is! *Voici!*" A porter came running.

Edwina did not move, and now perforce he had to discover her. He gazed down upon Edwina's cigarette, upon Edwina's silken knee. He stiffened.

"Pardon me——"

There was a crispness to his enunciation, a crispness to the crease of his trousers. He wore a Phi Beta Kappa key, and a small brush mustache, quite recent. His profile was regular and intolerant. Before ever I saw the Cambridge label on his trunk, I recognized him for Harvard—a very young Harvard who had not yet grown out of a dead-serious faith in the system of absolute categories for girls.

Edwina tossed the cigarette aside, came alive like a kitten uncurling for play from a stupid nap. She aimed the shaft of her smile at the young man; he did not smile back.

"I am sorry," he articulated with scrupulous courtesy, "to disturb you, but the official insists upon examining the contents of my trunk."

"Oh?" teased Edwina, not stirring.

"Yes."

Edwina sat on; he merely waited, very much aloof.

"Suspicious character?" she gibed.

"Pardon?"

Another wait.

"Why?" pouted Edwina. "There's no customs here—what are they lookin' for?"

"Thing judges and senates have been bought for," murmured Mrs. McIver, easing off the situation.

The young man thawed slightly to the literary allusion.

"The thing judges and senates——" frowned the girl, relinquishing the trunk.

"Gold," said the young man curtly.

"Gold!" laughed Mrs. McIver.

"They browsed through our trunks, too, Edwina; we're not allowed to go smugglin' gold out of the country."

There followed the farce of poking under a top layer of pajamas, correctly monogrammed. Edwina was frankly interested; the young man was aloof, but pink; Mrs. McIver spoke tactfully of the curious cloud above La Turbie.

Now the young man raised his hat meticulously to us and departed.

Edwina bent to the trunk label—"John Porter Daggett"—murmured something about the canvas suit case, and followed him straight.

She paused only to yank the close purple hat from her head; and I sat down under the sudden shock of Edwina's hair—straight, bobbed, flaming.

"Funny little orange top," observed Edwina's mother.

Well, it was funny; but perhaps, too, it was—decorative in its way.

"Time," said the thickset man, consulting his watch, "for the tug." He had, I noticed, long-fingered, slim hands, at odds with the rest of him. His eyes, following Mrs. McIver's, just brushed Edwina. "I've been looking for a red-headed girl."

"Perhaps I can lend you mine," smiled Mrs. McIver.

We hung over the ship's rail for a last glimpse of Monte Carlo, the mountains, the little high, old hill towns, the clouds, like a fairyland blown backward in a bubble of sunlight; Edwina commenced to be bored. We slid down the coast of Italy—ridge after ridge of snow-clad mountains, like opalescent clouds piled up—and Edwina was more bored. We passed Corsica by night, a

high, dark shadow with a tail light, and Edwina was utterly bored.

We watched the prow of the boat cut the water, and Mrs. McIver talked.

"Curious about Edwina, here—she's like no one in either Sam's family or mine. When she was born, I just looked at her, with all that fuzz of red hair, and I felt they'd made a mistake. You know"—with an apologetic laugh—"the poor little Russian prince, Alexis, was born at that time, and I got the idea that somehow they'd shifted them—Alexis was mine, and Edwina was theirs. The odd part of it is he had a McIver look, while Edwina resembled the Russian grand duchesses. I wrote my brother: 'Bill, don't breathe it to a soul, but the stork, knowing the poor czarina couldn't bear up under the disgrace of another girl, has gone and played us a mean trick.' Well, Bill sent me an article out of the next *Sunday Times* which told how the new little czarevitch bore no resemblance to either his father or his mother, and he simply wrote on it, 'Honest, Meg, I didn't tell.'" Mrs. McIver's gurgle of laughter still apologized. Edwina yawned audibly.

I looked at Edwina to compare, in wonder, the mother's romantic conception of her daughter with the original. But either the moonlight had changed Edwina, accentuating the wide mouth, the high cheek bones, turning blue eyes green and orange hair silver, lending her a beauty arresting in its strangeness, or Mrs. McIver had done the trick: Edwina might, indeed, have been a Russian grand duchess in disguise.

"Like sliced moonlight—those waves as they're flung back," murmured Mrs. McIver.

"If you're goin' to rave about scenery——"

We were alone.

"You know," she continued, "I'm right worried about Edwina. I want Edwina to marry, but I'm fearful she'll

marry just by way of tryin' something new. Nancy, now, is so keen about her library work that it's a sort of guarantee to me she won't marry for anything but love. If there were anything in the world that Edwina wanted to do——"

"A career?"

"H'm! She can dance and she can sing; but she's so delicate—a tendency to colds. Oh, well——"

Our middle-aged American friend of the dock, whose name, we had learned, was Johnson, sauntered by, and I left Mrs. McIver and him deep in a discussion of Barrie's plays.

I was at the hair-brushing stage when Edwina, to my amazement, slammed into my stateroom without knocking. She slumped into the only chair, and announced that she had been playing mah jong with a reporter named Charlie Lauer and some others.

"He's a nosin' out celebrities for a story—fine chance on this boat." She shrugged. "He's a dub, but young."

"And John Porter Daggett?" I queried.

"A stiff."

"He's an instructor of French at Harvard; has been over studying," I informed her.

"You've been talkin' to him?"

"No, the professor's wife told me."

Now she became confidential about clothes and boys, about the dizzy speed of a young married set to which she had attached herself.

"His stories—well they were the craziest things—he kept me laughin' all evening; there was one—but don't tell mother."

"How old are you, Edwina?"

She was immediately interested in how old I thought she might be, was pleased by my hazard of: "Sixteen."

"I'm nineteen—twenty next summer; I can't bear to get old. I'd just as soon get dead. How old are you?"

I owned my twenty-nine years.

"You can keep an eye on mother,

anyhow. Mother and I," she said, "aren't interested in the same things. Mother's always sketchin', and readin' French, and I can't bear——"

"What are you interested in?" I wondered sympathetically.

"Huh? Why, I reckon I'm interested in people—young people. And singing—I can sing. And dancing! I like dancing better than anything in the world," she declared with passion. She uncurl'd herself from the chair, did two one-steps in the limited space. "And I reckon," she added with unblinking frankness, considering her face in the mirror, "I reckon I'm interested in getting married." She tried a dab of my new mimosa-scented powder, turned and kissed me easily, impersonally, like a child, helped herself to a mandarine from the basket of fruit, and lolled from the room.

"Little Russian Prince Alex——" reached me, as I drowsed off. It was Mrs. McIver and Mr. Johnson still pacing with the moon beyond my open porthole.

I caught fragments at intervals:

"The type, this Donna-May," said Mr. Johnson, "but——"

Who was Donna-May? Familiar name! I slept.

I was reminded of Mr. Johnson's words the following morning. Edwina and a plump young man raced down the deck toward the goal of our steamer chairs; she caught his arm, slid laughing the last few steps past the chair of young Daggett, who did not deign to glance from his book.

"Charlie Lauer," flung off Edwina. "He's on the trail of——"

"Say, I've heard he's Brockman himself—Leon Brockman, big theatrical producer," panted the young man earnestly. "You've been talking to him. Is it true?"

"His name," replied Mrs. McIver, "is Mr. Johnson."

"On the passenger list, yes. But suppose he's Brockman traveling incog?"

"Well, ask him," she laughed; "and let me know what he says. I'm interested."

"Gosh, an interview from Leon Brockman on any——"

"Edwina," murmured Mrs. McIver, her eyes following them down the deck, "looks rather well in that blue——"

"Is he Brockman?" I asked idly.

"It's a secret. You wouldn't repeat it, but don't tell Edwina. Edwina," she chuckled, "never can keep anything."

"Then he really is the big——"

"Yes. He was telling me about this Donna-May——"

"Musical comedy!" I fixed her.

"He wanted her for the part she's been playing in London, but it's a second rôle, and she won't take anything but the lead in New York. She's not suited for the lead, he says, and besides, he's already engaged Nietza for that. He's stuck. It would be nice," said Edwina's mother, "if Edwina could do the part."

I stared. No, it was not a joke. Mrs. McIver was serious.

"What," I managed feebly, "is the part?"

"Edwina dances remarkably well, and she has a voice. Why, it's Joanna in 'Madame Mariska,' that pretty little Viennese thing. We saw it in London, and I remarked at the time that Donna-May resembled Ed——"

"Vesuvius!" interrupted the purser.

"Ah, 'Vesuvius' with its plume of smoke." Oh, purser, do you ever have fancy-dress dances on the boat?"

"But, yes, madame, if the passengers wish it. One sells masks and fancee dresses in the barber shop. There is few young people this time, but——"

"It would be—fun," said Mrs. McIver thoughtfully.

It was too late in the afternoon, when we weighed anchor at Naples, to do either Pompeii or Vesuvius, so we wan-

dered up and down the surging, narrow streets of old Naples. Mrs. McIver went from ragged children in a patch of sunlight to a little street shrine with a virgin, floating cherubs, burning candles, and wished passionately for her sketchbook and colors; Edwina protested the smells, and fiercely resented the flat basketful of little raw, silver fish which bowed to her from the head of a passing boy. In between times Mrs. McIver was oddly pertinacious in her pursuit of an apron. She rummaged through pinwheels, sausages, calicoes, flagons of Chianti, false faces, fluted macaronis, in the heterogeneous assortment of the little street shops. Edwina objected: if her mother kept on collecting "silly trash," they'd have not a cent left over from the trip.

"Sam," Mrs. McIver laughingly explained to me, "has said we may keep anything that remains from our three thousand, and Edwina's economy springs from a vision of clothes."

"I want to go back to the boat," stated Edwina suddenly.

"A colorful apron, made peasant style. Here——"

"But what would you *do* with it, mother?"

"It's colorful," I admitted.

"Green, purple, royal blue," gloated Mrs. McIver; "no clash with—— What, dear?"

"I want," insisted Edwina ominously, "to go back to the boat. I'm tired. We'll go now."

"How much—oh, what is the Italian?"

"Now—now—now!" Thoroughly amazed, I was treated to an exhibition of raw temper. Edwina stood in the middle of the narrow street, blocking traffic, and stamped her foot. Her face got red; she looked as though she would cry; she was crying.

"One minute," soothed Mrs. McIver. "Five lira? It's only five lira, Edwina. I'll have to go now." She turned to

me. "You stay as long as you want, but don't lose your way to the dock," she laughed back.

I found her, an hour later, in her steamer chair, an old, snug, brown-wool hat raked over her eyes, squinting contentedly up at Vesuvius. She had her sketch block on her knees, a bottle of dirty water at her elbow, and she was screwing her brush around in her mouth.

I was curious as to how she would explain Edwina's tantrum: would she ignore it, or would she plead that Edwina was "not well?" But Mrs. McIver did neither—she did not pass over the outburst, nor did she fall back on that final maternal apology.

"Just like Edwina," she chuckled, stressing it, and proceeded to regale me with reminiscences of Edwina's worst rages. Mrs. McIver had just the right blend of laughter and fondness for her daughter's absurdities; if you did not see it, with her, as the richest joke that Edwina should stand in the middle of a street of Naples and bawl for her own way, you did catch from Mrs. McIver, in spite of yourself, a certain feeling of indulgence for the wrong-headed little carrot-top. Yet the thought occurred to me if Mrs. McIver could carry off for Edwina that exhibition, what couldn't she carry off for Edwina?

That was Naples. It was later, I remember, that Mrs. McIver and I started a search for Edwina. We found her in the smoking room playing mah jong and drinking liqueurs with Charlie Lauer and several of the ship's officers. Edwina had a crème de menthe with cracked ice and a straw; her small face was flushed, and her eyes, as she sipped from the pretty, frost-green concoction, were green themselves, with black pupils, like a cat's eyes. Indeed, there was a restless beauty to Edwina, as bright and as strange as the gleam of her fantastic orange hair beneath the electric lights, so that Brockman—or

Johnson—who played solitaire at the next table, watched her with a considering interest. Even young Daggett, who sat in a corner very much alone and drank black coffee, was aware of Edwina with a certain high disdain; while Edwina, for her part, was recklessly conscious of the young man's disapproval. The purser was excusing himself with his French bow; Edwina jerked her bare arm from beneath Lauer's plump hand, tossed her hair from her eyes, called to Daggett a challenge to take the purser's place.

"Thank you, I don't play."

Edwina flamed her chagrin.

It was at that inopportune instant that Mrs. McIver presented herself.

"Mother, you look like a tramp in that hat! Why can't you fix yourself up decent?" It was a bad moment; Edwina's mouth was pushed out; she was audible and obvious to the entire smoking room.

But Mrs. McIver, who did veritably resemble a tramp, only pulled the hat farther down over her freckled nose and struck the attitude of a jaunty little tough. The moment passed in a laugh—even Daggett smiled.

"That bye," murmured Mrs. McIver in my ear, "is finer than the others."

"Ginger ale or cognac?" Johnson hailed her eagerly. We slid into the leather seat beside him, and he and Mrs. McIver lost themselves in a discussion of springer spaniels, and Scotch tea cakes, and the Montmartre.

Palermo followed. We lay, in the morning, in the harbor of the Golden Shell, and Edwina asked me, out of Mrs. McIver's hearing, if I would let her mother go ashore with me, while Mrs. McIver informed me, in an aside from her daughter, that we would run away from Edwina. We had a delightful day. We gathered impressions of little, dusty donkey carts with bright Bible scenes painted on them, of Ara-

bian Nights cathedrals with golden mosaics and whole altars of lapis lazuli, of gorgeous paisley shawls on incredibly poor peasant women, of deep-purple violets for sale on the streets and golden-brown amber for sale in the shops. Mrs. McIver bought easily, with a giggled: "Edwina will be furious when she sees." Her taste was odd. She passed up a silken strand of genuine Sicilian ambers for a string of ugly, variegated beads as large as Easter eggs. She pursued indefatigably a book of French nursery rhymes with music, a difficult thing to find in a Sicilian town, and a colored-print handkerchief, a quest not unreasonable in a city of calico kerchiefs, but elusive in the particular combination of greens and purples which she had in mind. We rounded up both finally, and celebrated with too much Chianti in a restaurant. Mrs. McIver tied the bright-spotted handkerchief over her hat and beneath her chin in a knot, and chanted a French song from her colored picture book.

"Edwina," she murmured contentedly, as she drained her third glass, "makes me stop with one."

Edwina herself, when we came aboard, was gloomily eating the raisins from her tea cake and turning the pages of a book from the ship's library entitled "Love in a Little House;" John Porter Daggett, who held down a neighboring wicker table, was absorbed in a small, crumbly, brown-leather volume which looked like a first edition of Molière at least. Edwina had the beginning of a cold, and she was correspondingly cross.

"If you'd put on your woolen stockings——"

Edwina sniffed.

"And leave them on——"

Edwina snuffled.

"I don't like——"

"Oh, mother, quit your fussin'!"

"But I'm sorry, dear, that you have to go and get a cold just at this time;

I particularly wanted you to—to be in voice."

"He's a pig," announced Edwina, glowering at Daggett, who gave her his cool, handsome profile as he passed our table. "Do you know what he said to Charlie Lauer? He said: 'There's not a nice gal on the boat.' Considering I am the only gal on the boat——"

"I can see——" admitted Mrs. McIver impartially. "Some of the things you do, Edwina——"

"What have I done?"

"It's my objection," concluded Mrs. McIver calmly: "you spoil your chances with the really fine boys."

"Fine boys!" scorned Edwina. "Fine—pigs! He can go to—to hell."

Her mother let that pass.

Yet it was a judgment on her Edwina which Mrs. McIver, whatever she might say, was not content to let rest, and I was amused at her tactics on the following morning. She was pouring over her book of French nursery rhymes:

"*Étrennes*," she puzzled; "*étrennes*." She waved to Daggett, who happened along. "You are an instructor of French, aren't you?"

Harvard warmed to the call of learning. Now their heads were together; Daggett was giving her the lines in beautiful French; she was giving him the time with the beat of a hairpin on her chair arm.

They were laughing over one when Edwina came by. She loitered; she stopped.

"Oh!" Mrs. McIver accepted her casually. "I was telling Edwina it would be nice if she would learn to sip some of these. Listen, dear:

*"En passant par la Lorraine,
Avec mes sabots——"*

"But what does it mean?" wondered Edwina. "*Sabots*?"

There was the barest chilly pause; then:

"Wooden shoes, you know," he translated it for her.

"Edwina's French!" giggled Mrs. McIver. "We were in a tea room in Nice and Edwina asked the waiter for 'b-oo-tered toast,' with an air of speaking in the purest Parisian."

"Well, it is 'toast,'" protested Edwina.

But the ice was broken.

Edwina gathered the ship's cat into her arms, and subsided definitely into her deck chair; with the cat purring against her cheek she looked picturesque and content. By one of her easy transitions Mrs. McIver had shifted the spotlight to her daughter.

"This little old Scotch gentleman had such a delightful way of telling Edwina that he liked her hair straight better than all fuzzed up. 'Little lady,' he said, 'I see only your hair when it's stuck out; it's lovely hair'—indeed, it was lovely hair with the sun on it, as even young Daggett must have remarked——"but I like to see you."

"Come on, mah jong," cut in Charlie Lauer, stopping before Edwina.

"Don't want to," she replied laconically.

Did the shadow of Daggett's little brush mustache conceal the tiniest smile of gratification as Lauer slouched off? I was not certain.

I drowsed; woke to:

"Edwina's French is hopeless, but if you'd just take her in hand, Mr. Daggett."

"Would you?" smiled Edwina.

"An hour a morning?" he suggested.

Now, but for Edwina's cold, it never could have happened as it did. She was in bed with the cold until long past Gibraltar. Young Daggett inquired about her politely. He dawdled about with Edwina's mother, and Edwina's mother spun him all the little whimsical yarns that backed up her own romantic version of Edwina.

"Waiters," I would catch, "discover her prejudices and spoil her fearfully. Why, there was one at the Miramère who just knew, by some seventh sense, that Edwina would have a passion for apple sauce with nutmeg."

And again:

"There she stood, that little slim, straight figure in pajamas with all that startled mop of red hair, and I said, 'Edwina, what is wrong?'"

It went on and on, a colorful, most intimate picture of a young girl. Young Daggett was virgin ground, one of those rigid boys whom you knew, at a glance, to be innocent of even a sister, and Mrs. McIver's familiar little sketchings of Edwina must have caught at his imagination.

I can't tell you, even now, how she did it. She guarded Edwina's voice like the voice of an opera singer, and of course that made its impression. She fluctuated chiefly between Daggett and Johnson, though she scattered miscellaneous little anecdotes of Edwina among the rest of the passengers, too, until the whole ship was inquiring with interest and solicitude for "the little, red-headed girl." She merely talked—that is the nearest I can come to it. She talked; she talked consistently upon one subject; and she was never a bore. She made no pretensions for her daughter.

"Mount Etna in Spain!" she giggled. "But even poor little Edwina would know better than that." And again: "You haven't discovered Edwina's one artificiality? Why, her eyelashes! No, they're pink, naturally."

Then, when we were in midocean, after almost a week's absence, Edwina reappeared. She still had her snuffle, her eyes were watery and pink lidded, and her mouth, in a little pinched, white face, was larger than ever. She was not pretty, but she carried her head high, and she could dance! She did a loose shuffle and canter with the plump Lauer youth, and her feet, her whole body,

had the easy rhythm of a dancing colored boy's. She did a variation of a fox trot with the little French purser, and the looseness was curbed to tricky little side steps and heel business, executed to a sharp and clicking nicety. Edwina might be raw and long as to body, but she had both the genius and the rules, the abandon and the technique, there in the tips of her silver dancing pumps. She discarded the purser; her eyes roved over Johnson—on the side lines with Mrs. McIver—found Daggett. The boy, handsome in correct evening attire, was hung uneasily in a doorway.

Edwina, with a lift of her shoulders, and a faint smile, invited him to dance with her.

Daggett's eyebrows made a barely perceptible, rather nervous negative.

Edwina's mouth was instantly pushed out in a scowl; with a single gesture she ran the fingers of her two hands through her hair so that it stuck out, on either side, in two orange tufts. She stood an instant longer, a green-and-silver figure, swaying. Then she picked the Russian drummer out of the orchestra, flung herself, with that contortionist, into an amazing series of gymnastics.

Young Daggett's whole body became one with the unbroken crease of his trousers; he turned on his heel and departed.

They finished to applause. But Edwina's gaze slid off the dazed and excited little drummer, side-stepped Charlie Lauer; she left the room abruptly by young Daggett's door.

Now Mrs. McIver, who held the purser by a coat sleeve and was the center of a rapidly collecting group, gathered me in.

"And I can see you, Professor Sills, as an Arab street vender: Mrs. Sills' kimono, a turban, rugs over one arm, beads over the other—and presto! You, Hester"—she addressed me—"well, why

couldn't you take off Edwina herself? Raveled red for——"

"What?" I asked. "Why?"

"The fancy-dress party. The purser here"—she tweaked his sleeve—"thinks we're all too old. But to-morrow night we'll show him! Now remember, gals and boys"—she spurred on school teachers, priest, and middle-aged travelers alike—"remember, if one gal of you or one boy of you dares appear out of costume—a costume of some kind——"

All the following day the plot thickened. There were whispered consultations, bursts of laughter, glimpses through stateroom doors of Chinese table runners and Persian scarfs in process of conversion. Mrs. McIver was the center of it. It was not until late afternoon that she gave up inventing costumes for every one else, and came in search of Edwina. Edwina was to be found bent studiously to the delayed first French lesson with Daggett.

"It is," he was saying, "an idiomatic expression."

Edwina, her blue eyes on his profile, was murmuring her complete comprehension.

An hour later, in quest of pins, I hesitated before the McIver stateroom. Edwina's raised voice reached me:

"I won't! I just won't!"

"But, dear, don't you see——"

I rapped; opened to Mrs. McIver's: "Come in!"

I gaped at Edwina, and I began to see a light. Over a green underskirt and a white peasant blouse smocked in orange, she wore the apron, with its purples and greens and royal blues, from Naples. About her neck she wore the bright beads like Easter eggs and tied over her orange-red hair and knotted under her chin the purple-and-green kerchief, both from Palermo. Her high cheek bones were accentuated with two comical, perfectly round spots of orange rouge. She stood, in one

purple-silk stocking and one green-silk stocking, and refused to put on the huge, fur-topped, white-satin bedroom slippers which her mother had picked up from Heaven knows where.

"I sure 'nough won't! You just want to make me a freak, that's what."

"But, Edwina, I only——"

"Won't!"

"Well, if you won't, you won't." Mrs. McIver even achieved a laugh.

"But, my dear, do you mean to say you don't adore yourself? Why, you're like a figure out of 'Chauve-Souris.'"

I rushed in.

"'Chauve-Souris?'" said Edwina doubtfully.

"Of course, if you want to go as a little tarlatan fairy or a Martha Washington like any ordinary, merely pretty girl! With another orange blurb on your chin——" Edwina considered the effect in the mirror.

It was like all fancy-dress parties, with the usual collection of kimonos and Spanish shawls. Toward the close of the evening Mrs. McIver, a merry little tramp in patches and tin cans, dispensed with the orchestra, and herself played the "Music Box" tune for Edwina's solo dance. It was one of those little thin, dainty, tinkling things, all mincing little runs and stiff poses, and Edwina, looking like a new kind of doli, did it to perfection. Johnson, a highlander in plaid scarf, a lady's accordion-plaited skirt hitched up about his bulky waist, and a whisk broom dangling at his belt, turned the page for Mrs. McIver, and watched Edwina with his shrewd eyes narrowed. The music box died off.

"She looks——" nodded Johnson.

"Doesn't she?" I suddenly felt a purpose moving beneath Mrs. McIver's eagerness. "And she can dance?"

"Yes; not so important. Can she sing, is the question. Let's hear——"

"Not a note!" Her hand came down on the piano in a crash of chords, mixed with her laughter. "She has a cold,

and I'll not have her spoilin' her voice, even for you. Before we reach New York, I promise it. But she has a sure 'nough lyric soprano—you'll see! Why, her singin' teacher says——"

"Say, you *are* Brockman!" blurted Charlie Lauer, whose plumpness had been poured into one of the crew's middy suits. "I just got a squint at a telegram addressed to Leon Brockman."

"Telegram?"

"Uh, the purser. But you're Brockman, and I want to know——"

"That darned Nietza again——"

"Nietza?" grabbed Lauer. "What show——"

"Oh, Heaven! 'Madame Mariska'—title rôle—Little Shubert some time in March," said Brockman curtly.

"'Madame Mariska?'" Edwina wondered. "But mother and I saw that in London. You mean, Mr. Johnson here is the man who——"

"He is putting on that same little musical play in New York, dear. You may remember," murmured Mrs. McIver irrelevantly, "how much Donna-May resembled you, dear—the little one who wore the little bright peasant's costume like yours."

"Peasant's costume, like mine?" echoed Edwina, staring down at her own purples and greens. Even Edwina seemed to sense some hidden purpose lurking behind her mother's random works. "You mean this Donna-May——"

But Daggett, who had made concession to the occasion to the extent of appearing in a particularly immaculate golfing costume, cut in. There was nervousness beneath his dignity, and he spoke with the clipped sharpness of a man who has steeled himself to courageous action.

"Would you care to take a turn about the deck—a—er—short constitutional?"

Edwina wavered; she wanted to hear.

"And say, I want to know—the New York cast for 'Madame——'"

Edwina relinquished curiosity; she turned to Daggett with her starry smile.

"Reckon I would. Only I'd rather take a seat up on the top deck."

Well, Mrs. McIver's lurking purpose was soon ship's talk; it was more than a purpose, it was an established fact. Whether Edwina, who "never could keep anything," boasted, or whether Mrs. McIver, in her maternal pride and her absolute certainty of the result, dropped a word or two, I am uncertain. At all events, the rumor spread: Brockman had discovered a new musical-comedy star in the person of the little red-headed girl! Mrs. McIver, interviewed by Lauer in his official capacity of reporter, laughingly supposed that it was true—or would be true as soon as Edwina had entirely recovered from her cold and could demonstrate her voice.

Edwina, next interviewed, verified her mother's statement. She supposed she might play *Joanna* of "Madame Mariska" in New York this winter; she supposed she might be starred alone in something after that; yes, she liked dancing better than anything in the world. Already Edwina's manner had taken on, to the amusement of her merry little mother, something of the airiness of the star. To both Edwina and Mrs. McIver, neither of them doubting the girl's ability for a moment, it was a simple matter, merely a question of the testing. Brockman himself, approached by Lauer, would not commit himself beyond an uneasy statement to the effect that "the whole thing hung on the little girl's voice."

So we waited. The entire ship waited for Edwina's song. Edwina's hoarseness became a matter of public concern. And when we cut into the Gulf Stream the wrong way and the rough weather at last struck us, people kept up with an idea of being on hand for the little red-headed girl's concert, which was scheduled for the last night at sea.

Daggett, during the interval of suspense, had faded into Edwina's background. But he did stick close to Edwina, and there was something dogged and tight—stretched—in his stiffness of bearing now. On the afternoon of the concert, I watched him spanning, with a hand, the distance from the ship to New York, on the chart which marked the daily runs. Edwina came along.

"Anxious?"

"No."

"Then why— How long do you make it?"

"To-morrow afternoon—without a fog." He stared fixedly at the map; his voice lacked its usual, clean-cut enunciation.

There was a hush.

"Sorry," drawled Edwina.

"Are you?"

"Here, maybe you're measurin' it wrong." Their hands touched. "I am—sorry." Edwina's cheek brushed his sleeve; suddenly her whole body relaxed against his like a little girl coming close. It felt for him, through my own body, the warm flush, the physical admission of the child's loveliness which I had felt that first day when Edwina had surprisingly kissed me.

Daggett did not move. His chin, from where I sat, was pink.

"Stiff—stiff—poker stiff!" I gibed him mentally.

"Let's—go up on the top deck."

He switched frigidly.

"Yes."

The climax of the storm arrived simultaneously with the climax of Edwina's concert. It is not my intention to go into the details of the concert. It is enough to say that Mrs. McIver took her seat at the piano, and was sorry there was no score of "Madame Mariska" to be had—it was her one apology—but Edwina would just have to give some of her own simple little songs. So Edwina hugged a post, while

the ship lurched three ways at once, and opened her generous mouth, and sang! She sang a little thing about swallows, and another little thing about a four-leaf clover, and a final little thing about yellow roses and death. Edwina's lyric soprano trembled, and I tried to assure myself that it was the trembling of the ship. There was a little strain of doubting uneasiness over the audience, but Mrs. McIver's triumphant nod and smile of encouragement to her Edwina—"On, on! we have practically done it!"—was a sight to inspire confidence. The voice lifted up, up, up on a wave, and, between Edwina and the ship, I thought we should never have done with rising. Could I be wrong? But, no; one glance at Brockman's face, patient, expressionless, convinced me that I was right. It was the kind of soprano that renders "I Love You Truly" at small home weddings.

She recovered from death and the yellow roses and broke forth into an encore:

*"En passant par la Lorraine,
Avec mes sabots—"*

Now Daggett's work with her was apparent; pride in his pupil, I noted, struggled in Daggett with some deeper emotion. The boy's ear was perhaps sensitive to music!

"Recontrai trois capitaines—"

Mrs. McIver pierced Brockman with a bright smile which clinched their bargain. I slipped from the room.

Applause reached me first, where I had hid myself in the deserted writing room. Leon Brockman reached me next.

"I didn't promise a— I only said I'd hear her voice," he groaned.

"Well, you heard! Dashed if I can break it to that little woman, but—look here—you're her friend."

"No!"

"Her dancing would have passed. But Nietza can dance like a whirl-

wind—can't sing above a muted orchestra; Morely can dance, but he *talks* to music. Whole blooming cast can dance. It's a singer we need. Can you hear her"—his slim, artist's hand made a gesture over his large stomach—"sobbing the 'Bohemian Love Waltz,' finishing the whole darn show? Why——"

"Sh!"

Lauer lounged through on his way to the bar; stared at us curiously.

"You——" he pleaded with me.

"No, no!"

"But some one has got to tell her now! I can't have——"

"Hush!" I warned him. "Your chance—here they come." It was Mrs. McIver, stepping jauntily, her blue eyes, her entire, quick little person bright with victory; she was followed by Edwina and Daggett.

"About Edwina's part in 'Madame Mariska——'"

Brockman wiped a moisture from his upper lip.

"Edwina would love to do the part for you——"

"But——"

"But I thought it would be nicer to break it to you at once. You can't be any more disappointed than I am—than Edwina is—but the fact is"—she laughed—"the fact is, Edwina had decided to be married."

I turned. It was then I discovered the detail: John Porter Daggett possessed Edwina's hand in a firm grasp that challenged the world; Edwina's blue, blue eyes possessed Daggett's handsome profile in a gaze that frankly adored.

"You mean," struggled Brockman, "that she can't——"

"We mean," Daggett summed it up

concisely with a rigid, blushing dignity, "that it would be inadvisable for my—my wife to accept a position on the stage. Of course you understand——"

"Of course!" breathed Brockman.

"But, Edwina, you're sure, quite sure," charged Mrs. McIver, "that you love John better than your career? It's dancin', remember, and you adore dancin'; and singin'"—Brockman shuddered—"and you like to sing. You're quite sure?"

Edwina came from Daggett to Brockman. Did she, for a moment, waver? The very boat hung poised with Brockman in suspense.

"Sure," sighed Edwina; Brockman felt for his handkerchief.

"You see!" bubbled Mrs. McIver.

"Couldn't help listenin' in," blurted Charlie Lauer, rearing himself from a deep chair; "but say! First Brockman himself and inside dope on the coming theatrical season, which is enough; then Brockman discovers a new star, which is more; then the new star relinquishes the stage for love, which is the pig's chin whiskers. I *see* the headlines! Tell me, Mrs. McIver——"

Mrs. McIver was going strong.

"I remember, when Edwina was a little gal——"

"Mother, if you just *could* stop talkin'!"

"Even then she could sing—remarkable in such a baby. You recall that old one: 'Yip-y-addle-y-aye?'" giggled Mrs. McIver. "Well, I had her in church one day, and the choir had just finished singing 'Rock of Ages,' when I looked up and saw Edwina standing in the middle of the aisle, in a little white dress with green ribbons, her hair shining like a halo——"



As to growing old—women have the advantage over men; for the average man's hair turns gray five years earlier than woman's. But then women have more than nature's aid on their side when it comes to delaying the ravages of age.



Ming and Mimosa

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "After Dark,"
"The Maid of Melos," etc.



JOAN ESTES stood in a badly furnished sitting room that might have been an integral part of an elderly hotel in the States, with its worn rattan and drab denim upholstery, its absurd Nottingham lace curtains that fluttered annoyingly between her and—China.

Peking lay outside her windows. But the Grand Hotel smugly landmarking the midst of the legation quarter, effectually barred it out. She came to stand at the curtained windows, looked forlornly down upon a street well paved, broad—even moderately clean. The very paving stones annoyed her. They expressed so completely the triumph of the Western world, which had laid them, that the steel chariots of progress might pass more swiftly to an unearned goal.

The girl's charming mouth puckered at her own conceit as an antiquated European carriage, preceded by outriders mounted on shaggy little ponies, rolled past, bearing some Chinese official to one of the legation buildings near by. She visualized the waxen man within the equipage; bland, austere, serene, yet nourishing a secret hate toward these foreigners of all nationalities who trespassed so arrogantly! The outriders

swerved suddenly as a gleaming car of Belgian make shot through the maze of traffic, and usurped the right of way. And the forlorn cavalcade was blocked.

Joan dropped the fold of curtain, resumed her restless pacing. Her fair brows met over her pellucid gray eyes in annoyance and boredom. To be shut in here, day after day, while Gilbert lingered in a distant province within whose borders lay the coal deposit he had been commissioned to investigate, was trying beyond endurance. She hadn't come to China with her fiancé's mother to be cooped up in a European hotel! And down the matting-floored corridor Mrs. Moncton lay cherishing the fatigue that a three-day train journey can inspire in a large, lethargic woman to whom a journey is agony!

Joan liked Ada Moncton; but as a companion in adventure she was inadequate, to say the least, albeit necessary. For a young woman brought up in the shade of ancient Cambridge elms is chary of adventure that does not include a casual chaperon.

She hated to admit her limitations, but she knew quite well that she couldn't wander about the city with the arrogant ease of the two nondescript English

women tourists who made themselves notable even in the colorful, shifting panorama that was the big hotel's floating population. But if Gilbert didn't join them soon—

Joan struck her lovely hands together in the moment's desperation. To be bored is one thing; but to be deprived of the satisfying fulfillment of an age-old desire—for her passion for the East amounted to that—was another! She had dreamed of such a trip always. China had held the lure of the ages for her; its treasure of teak and jade and lacquer, its silken stuffs, hued and spun by cunning hands, its porcelains, glazed to immortal beauty—all these summed in tangible and lovely form the incorporeal splendor that was the East.

Gilbert loved the Orient, too. But only because he loved far places, and danger, and the thrill of wresting his black gold from barren tracts. She sighed. He was achieving his desire.

Or so she supposed, knowing him as well as she did. Gilbert always got what he wanted. Even when it was a concession as important as this, sought by half the financial groups of Europe. For the past year his every letter to her had been filled with the urgent import of his negotiations, which, if they proved successful, would not only fill the coffers of the American syndicate with which he was connected, but would also place them both safely beyond the ranks of the newly poor.

Joan was the most feminine of women; she adored success, and the panoply of its outward symbols. But, important as it was in her ambitious scheme of things, she wanted it kept subservient to the adoration that was her due. And Gilbert, devoted though he was, had a flair for absorbing himself in the business of life a little too much to the exclusion of that adoration! That, she realized, in the moment's honesty, was the leaven of her discontent.

If only Gilbert had awaited them in Peking as he had planned and promised, weeks before! She ceded the urgency of his mission in the north, or tried to, but that he should permit anything to postpone their immediate meeting, now that she was within his reach, after a year's separation, hurt her more than she admitted even to his mother.

She lifted her small, fair head, and let her eyelids fall suddenly to keep back the tears. It wasn't the glamorous East that lay beyond the legation quarter that she wanted. It was Gilbert, or some tender word from him.

The knock on her door came so aptly in fulfillment to her wish that for a moment she stared at the panels, marveling, then flew to admit whoever waited there.

It was a small, blue-coated China boy, bowing over a salver upon which lay a bit of white pasteboard. And the name inscribed thereon in old English script brought a little cry of astonishment to her parted lips. For Wu Chang Li, she recalled from Gilbert's letters, was that wealthy and powerful Manchu official whom the Chinese government had appointed to look after its interests in the Shan-she territory.

She would see him. Whatever her state of mind toward China and its disappointment, toward the baffling maze of politics and coal mines and concessions—incomprehensible things that had brought Gilbert here and yet had kept him from her—Wu Chang Li was not a gentleman to be dismissed in a high-handed manner.

"I will come down to the lounge directly," she told the blue-coated boy.

She paused just long enough to touch her honey-colored hair, dust her pale cheeks with powder, before she descended to the lower floor.

The dark, shabby lounge of the hotel was more or less crowded. Here were gathered the most cosmopolitan crowd to be found in all China. It was a

motley assortment of Europeans, for the most part. And among them she did not find the figure she sought.

She had a preconceived image of the man whose card she held. He would be one of those age-old yet ageless Manchus such as she had seen so often during her brief sojourn in China, neither bent nor shriveled, but with skin like smooth parchment stretched tight across the aquiline structure of his head, arrayed in some gorgeous profusion of silks, all signifying his splendor.

As she stood there in the lounge, a little uncertain, a little aloof, very expectant, a slim, lithe figure detached itself from a cluster of foreigners and came toward her. She was too absorbed in her immediate quest to be more than aware of his nearness until his uncadenced, perfectly enunciated syllables sounded in her ear.

"Miss Estes! How good of you to see me!"

She gazed at him large eyed, and saw in that first, full moment a slender, almond-eyed man of thirty, in Scotch tweeds that only a Bond Street tailor could have fashioned, quite perfect as to every carefully studied detail of Western dress. He would have been remarkable anywhere as being a well-dressed man among his kind; here he was a miracle. And he was more than that. He was some one she knew, some one she could not quite place.

"Have you forgotten how kind you were to me in Cambridge?" he asked.

"You are Wu Chang Li?" she cried in astonishment.

He inclined his lacquer-smooth head with a faint smile.

"And to me—Mr. Li!" she said, and found that he had almost magically dissolved a passage through the shifting mob about them.

From the comparative quiet of a shabby niche she heard his pleasant accents.

"I think nothing has ever pleased me

more than that you should remember me. I cherish all that—all my life in America and at Harvard, when I was getting my training for—whatever I am here, now. But of all those years there I recall no one week with so much of delight as that last gay week at Cambridge, because of you; and no two hours as much as those we had that last afternoon together on the Charles."

"And to find you here—like this!" she murmured. "I know, of course, of your affiliation with my—with Mr. Moncton. His letters have been quite full of you."

She stopped abruptly, to wonder a little at the singularly gentle and childlike smile which showed his beautiful, even teeth. Was she betraying herself to him?

"I am traveling with his mother, an old friend," she added.

"I know," he murmured. "And I have a message for you from him."

To Joan, it seemed that he watched her very carefully as he made the announcement. But to read what lay behind the inscrutability of his eyes was no less difficult than to map the bottom of a lake from its unruffled surface.

In so far as she could, she herself preserved a mask.

"Yes?"

"The message came to me in the midst of some official documents that came down to me from Shan-she. He asked me to regret to you that he is not yet ready to leave Shan-she."

"What?" Her gray eyes widened between their length of sooty lash. "Did he give no reason? Did he not say when I might expect him?"

"I am infinitely sorry. His message was rather—brief."

Joan found herself suddenly seething with rage against Gilbert. After all this weary of journey of hers, after all this desolate waiting in Peking, he so casually put her off through the intervention of a third person, without even

the courtesy of a direct message! Without even the civility of an explanation! It was intolerable. And she had wounded her pride by giving way to the first shock of her disappointment under this man's too watchful eyes. She must summon up her *amour propre*, retrieve herself. This strange Oriental must not see how grievous her wound had been.

"Thank you so much for delivering the message," she told him gently. "I will see that Mrs. Moncton gets it immediately; she has been quite unwell, since we reached Peking. It was very thoughtful of him to remember me, in the midst of all his interests. Do you know him very well?"

"Only officially."

From which she gathered that Gilbert had not told the Manchu of their engagement. So much the better, she admitted to herself; so much the less wound to her pride.

She smiled at him brilliantly.

"I had rather expected Mr. Moncton to join us immediately; I'm sorry, of course, for the gravest drawback to your enchanting city is that I can't explore it by myself! And I don't like beaten paths."

"Have you seen nothing but the legation quarter of my city?" he deplored. "If I might show you a little of the China that still remains to us, until our last strongholds are taken—"

She sensed a subtle reserve in his last words, as if he were shutting his thoughts away from her. And she remembered the dilapidated cavalcade of a curtained carriage, preceded ceremoniously by outriders, who, for all their barbaric dignity, had been shunted to the curb by a purring motor in whose tonneau lolled some Occidental potentate of the new dynasty!

An odd impulse to make reparation of a sort for all the indignity and injustice that had been heaped upon the race of this man, who had briefly been her

friend, years before, stirred within Joan. And the very impulse to refuse his offer served only to warm her words.

"How kind of you! But wouldn't it be an imposition?"

He smiled at her, and for an instant his unwrinkled lids drooped over the opaque blackness of his eyes.

"No."

She caught her breath.

"Then, if you find you have time for it before I leave, we'll go adventuring!"

"Could there be a better time than this? Are you free this afternoon?"

She was. Quite free, she thought forlornly. Except for Gilbert's mother, who would be placidly relieved at being quite alone for the afternoon. Still, she must explain her absence.

"I shall wait for you here, then," said Wu Chang Li. And watched her slight, dark figure cross the lounge to the staircase.

He waited where he was for a moment, then, as if he were only fatigued with sitting, he arose, and wandered out into the lobby with apparent aimlessness. He stopped casually by the desk, and murmured to the Eurasian mail clerk there.

The man bowed with servility.

"All letters, sah?" he droned in his singsong voice.

"From Shan-she."

The clerk bowed in instant and unwavering deference to the Manchu.

"It shall be as you wish."

And with that the parchment-tinted gentleman in tweed strolled back to the lounge to await Joan Estes.

Joan leaned toward her host with a delicious, wry little smile.

"This has been a most amazing adventure!" she told him.

It was quite true. She scarcely knew how she had happened to accept the charming Manchu's invitation to dine with him at his home. Reckless, fool-

hardy thing to have done, indeed! But her mood had been reckless, and a two-hour drive with him through the colorful native city under his expert guidance had only served to whet her longing for such adventures. And his suave reminiscence of old Cambridge days had made her almost forget that the exquisitely clad, lean young man beside her was of another race.

Besides, he had described to her his collection of Ming art forms in such profusion as no Occidental amateur had ever seen; and to Joan, Ming civilization symbolized the China she was here to discover.

Wu Chang Li made a gesture of deprecation.

"And why amazing?"

"A dinner such as you have given me is hardly to be had outside of Paris! Isn't it a bit unbelievable to linger over it—here?"

Her glance swept the dining room of Wu Chang Li's magnificent villa on the outskirts of the Manchurian city—a room in which she had just been served with as perfect a meal as she had ever had, from caviar to coffee, but served in a room of gold and ebony and brocade.

"You like my chef? He was at Pailard's. I bought him the last time I was in Paris. I think I must have wanted him for precisely this occasion."

"I never guessed that you Orientals——"

"We Orientals take the best of life, wherever we find it, whenever we think it is at its best." His gaze lingered on hers for a moment, with a meaning which she could almost interpret.

And then, subtly sensing that he had said too much, he changed.

"And now, if you are ready, may I show you some of the finer part of our Oriental life?"

"Your Ming treasures?" she guessed, instantly won to him again by his own withdrawal.

He smiled blandly.

"Do you care to see them?"

"It is what I came for, is it not?"

"I am truly grateful then, to possess my treasures. Are you ready?"

He knew she was, for she was already pressing out the light of her cigarette.

"Yes."

He spoke a word to the middle-aged Eurasian woman who had been present—though in the deep, far shadows of the room—throughout dinner. She was a plump, but serene, rather handsome half-caste of thirty five or so, still carrying traces of a former grace as she preceded them from the room.

"She has gone to order the candles lighted against our coming. She will still be with us," he explained.

He led the way in leisurely fashion through a maze of corridors that seemed to Joan to wind in endless labyrinth. At last they came to wide doors—great timbers of teak wrought together with heavy bronze—thrown back to reveal what at first appeared to be a dimly lit cavern.

He stopped Joan for a moment on the threshold.

"What do you think of it as a whole?" he asked.

She found herself inarticulate as she crossed the threshold to look the length of the long gallery that lay before her. It was arched with brilliant mosaic to represent in heroic proportions dragons battling in the heavens. The supporting arches themselves were of ebony, carved in semblance of serpents whose scales seemed to writhe in the flicker of a thousand candles in the sconces at their pedestals. These were of masonry, like the walls. The floor space was divided into alcoves, each division being a shelved case of ebony and crystal. And between these cases were barred embrasures in the wall which, windowless, admitted the soft night air, and with it a sensuous fragrance unlike anything Joan had ever known.

"And this is your collection!" she whispered.

"Yes. Do you mind staying here alone for a time? Not long. Han is here." He called the woman's name.

She came gliding toward them out of some alcove, like an incarnate spirit of this ancient splendor.

"Han will tell you anything about my collection you don't happen to know already. Her ancestors has been of my household for generations, and her gods are mine."

"And what are your gods?" Joan had to ask.

He smiled.

"My ancestors, my family—and this!" He included in a suave gesture all that lay before them.

He took his departure after that, and Joan followed the Eurasian woman in among the cabinets, and round the consoles underneath the embrasures. For an unspanned space of time she reveled among priceless treasures that had come down through long generations—ivories and jades and lacquers; porcelains of vivid, iridescent splendor that made her beauty-loving pulses leap.

And then Wu Chang Li reappeared. He was no longer the cosmopolitan in tweeds, as much of the West as the East. He had donned a splendid mandarin robe of green and gold and crimson, as if he dared not enter into this sanctuary without first attiring himself in the vestments of the votary.

So changed was he now—a change that was more subtle than mere outer garb—that Joan could scarcely identify him with the man of the earlier afternoon and evening; and while he awed her, he seemed only to increase the enchantment that was weaving itself about her.

He took her now from the woman's ciceronage, and began himself to talk. She listened in that sympathetic silence that links closer than words.

Presently they came to what Joan

recognized as the most superb piece in the collection. It stood at the far end of the gallery, on a breast-high pedestal of massive, carved ebony. A casket of ivory nearly a foot in cube, it was wrought most marvelously with images and dexterous inlays of enamel and gold. As she stared at it, awed by its beauty, she was conscious of a seductive, overpowering scent coming in upon her from the barred embrasure above.

"What is that—that perfume on the air?" she asked curiously.

"Mimosa. My mimosa, from the conservatories. It is wafted across this, you see—a constant offering to my ancestors."

"Your ancestors?" she was led to ask, when he checked himself.

"Yes. Shall we go on?" he said, suddenly a little aloof from her.

Her lovely eyelids drooped, as in surrender to some enchantment.

"I love it here. The scent—that magnificent casket—"

She put her hand out timidly, as if she longed to touch it with light finger tips. To her amazement he intercepted the gesture almost roughly.

"You must not touch that!" It was an inexorable order.

"But I want to touch it! What is it?" she asked, a little dazed.

"You must not sully it. It is not for you, who are not of my— And yet you say you are attracted by it. Strange!"

"I love it!" she heard herself say obstinately.

"I wonder—" he breathed. Then he possessed himself of the hand he had so ruthlessly beaten down.

"I have felt for you that same attraction," he told her. "From that week in Cambridge. I have never lost it."

Her breath caught in her throat audibly.

"What do you mean?"

"That I love you, and have always

loved you. That you are of my kind—accepted as mine——”

She drew back from him sharply.

“No!”

“But you will marry me! You were made for that, and you will not escape your fate,” he told her, and there was more of calm certainty than arrogance in his tones.

“Never! You must take me out of this place. I wish to go!” she commanded, badly frightened now.

He stared at her.

“You don’t know what you are saying.”

She cried desperately:

“I do—I do. You must let me go at once!”

He scanned her keenly across the short but impassible distance that now lay between them. And the mask that he had let drop a little earlier resumed its guard upon his dark, aquiline features.

“No.”

She would not cower before him; yet the imperturbable force of the man filled her with a sickish foreboding. And then, as he bent toward her, black eyes gleaming with an implacable desire, panic surged upon her. This gallery was a tomb of past generations, but sacred and secure—secure as steel and mortar could make it! Beyond this menacing, silk-robed figure lay a labyrinth of endless corridors to be threaded before she could escape, peopled with an army of servants who would descend upon her at a word from their master. She was trapped! The impalpable, yet deadly sweetness of the mimosa bloom that had enchanted her so short a time before drifted about her now, and it seemed to her that she must fight against it.

“You forget who you are, and who I am!” she told him imperiously, amazed at the cool pitch of her own tones. “I command you to let me leave instantly. You would not dare to detain me against my will.”

The sharp intake of his breath was sibilant.

“You are quite right. I forgot much a moment back; for an instant I was overwhelmed by your loveliness, reduced to a most shameless presumption.”

And then she saw that his humility was not for her. He turned swiftly to the chased, ivory casket that must have been a precious reliquary of his gods, bowed his head to utter strange, high-pitched cadence of self-reproach.

“Now I forget nothing. I am Wu Chang Li, and you are the beloved of Gilbert Moncton. Is it not so?”

Joan, staring at him, saw that beneath his words there was much that remained unspoken. And it was that which struck terror through her anew.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean——” He paused to think swiftly. “But why should I not tell you the truth? Then we will understand one another the more thoroughly. Gilbert Moncton is here in China to investigate and appraise what is generally known as the Shang-she territory. Coal lies there, and it is one of the few tracts still remaining to us. My government has already granted an option upon this valuable property to the interests your lover serves, because there was no other alternative. I, Wu Chang Li, am vitally interested in preventing the concession from passing to the American syndicate. If his report is honest, the American syndicate will overbid those who have my greater sympathy. If his report understates the truth sufficiently, the concession will go where I want it—to my own people.”

She pushed back a lock of her blond hair.

“But all this—what have I to do with it?”

His voice caressed her ironically.

“You do not understand? You are here now—my honored and well-protected guest. You will remain here

always—less honored, perhaps—unless Mr. Moncton's report is dictated by me. Your—let us say involuntary—visit will be no longer than Mr. Moncton cares to make it!"

"You would not do such a thing!"

"For China? Dear Miss Estes, it is only you of the Western world who place your own objective desires before your love for your country, your honor—as Gilbert Moncton will, presently! Yes, I will even tell you more. Mr. Moncton arrived in Peking an hour ago. The message I gave you was false, to serve my purpose. His own letters and wires have all been intercepted, at my orders."

Joan felt her heart leap to an ungovernable tempo of sheer delight. Nothing could make her desolate now—not even the Manchu's silken words.

"I did not bring you here to love you; even though, for an instant, when you put out your hands to that reliquary, I was mad enough to dream of your white-and-gold enchantments—I did love you, perhaps. But——"

He made a gesture of serene finality.

"And now I shall go to see Moncton, and ask him for his decision. You may be free in an hour; you may be here for years. It depends upon him. But while you are here, awaiting my return, you will be well protected. I shall leave Han to look after you, and command her to care for you well. I must, I regret, put you in another room than this. Will you come with me, or must I summon servants?"

Joan could only obey. The sense of human futility against this spell, against Ming and mimosa, and the ruthlessness of an old civilization, had overwhelmed her utterly.

"I will go with you," she said. "Han, the woman——"

"Will not leave you."

He struck his slender, saffron-tinted hands together, and the half-caste woman came toward them. He gave his

orders in English. Then he himself led the way half back up the gallery to one of the alcoves. From his robe he took a great bronze key, and not until he had inserted it into a concealed aperture did Joan realize that behind the lacquer paneling was a great, metal-studded door. He turned back the lock, and Joan found herself in a silk-hung chamber with the half-caste woman, listening to Wu Chang Li's soft, retreating footsteps.

Joan sat huddled where he had left her, a small, forlorn figure upon the teakwood couch, waxen pale against the exotic, gold-shot colors that decked it with luxury.

But it was not until the half-caste ayah drew shut the great bronze-and-teak doors that led into the Ming gallery that the girl felt to the fullest her captivity. For by the closing of those doors the room that was her prison became a tomb, silk hung, softly lit, but without egress of any sort.

It was the blankness of those four stone walls that quickened her heartbeats until they almost suffocated her. Not a window, not an opening to relieve the oppressive sense of their impregnability! From some cunningly constructed outlit the chamber was afforded ventilation, but that was all.

Joan strove to translate the bland, brown features of the woman who crouched, Buddha fashion, before the doors leading into the galleries. But there was nothing written upon the placid mask of her face to decipher. She was as calm, as serene, as unmoved, and immutable as an idol.

The surge of sheer happiness that Wu Chang Li's dispassionate admission of the truth had given rise to had receded. Joan was fast sinking into a desperate morass of terror. Not for herself as much as for Gilbert.

Gilbert, the soul of honor, the most conscientious of men in all his dealings,

reduced to such an impasse! She knew so well that the hideous choice the Manchu put to him could have but one issue, and that issue would destroy him.

She must do something to save him! But what? As long as she was imprisoned here, a hostage held against his honor, he was in Wu Chang Li's hands. But if, by any device of her wit or ingenuity, she could manage to break away—

In her extremity she wrung her hands until the sharp facets of her engagement ring dug into her soft flesh. She stared down at the great cabochon emerald with a sudden flicker of hope.

"Han," she called softly.

The serving woman rose to her feet with a swaying, supple movement, padded across the mosaic floor.

Joan drew her betrothal ring from her finger, and held it so the swinging light from above picked out every gleam of its green fire.

"This would buy your freedom, Han; Help me to mine, and it is yours."

The half-caste's inscrutable, soft eyes betrayed nothing.

"No."

The monosyllable slid without emphasis from her lips. She pattered back to her place with the sinuous grace she had retained from her dancing days. A faithful servant, this Eurasian woman! Joan sensed the futility of arguing against that imperturbable serenity. She slid the jewel back upon her finger, and let time pass.

Things like this didn't happen. And when they did happen, there was always some escape. There is no perfect combination of circumstances.

As she sat there, lost in frantic thought, her hands twisted and rent the fragile scarf of painted chiffon she wore. The room seemed oppressively warm to her fevered senses. If she could but get to those barred embrasures in the adjoining gallery, through which the soft air stole!

Even the ugly memory of the place of precious things could not quench her longing for a breath of cool air. Panic was creeping upon her again, but she fought it down.

She must remember the porcelains, the lacquers, the silken stuffs Wu Chang Li had spread before her beauty-loving vision. She fancied, rather pitifully as the scene in the gallery flashed before her, that beauty of inlay and carving and texture would always be associated with something horrible to her, now. Like that heady, subtle fragrance that drifted in from the mimosas in the Manchu's garden!

Strange that so ruthless and implacable a man should worship inanimate beauty as he did! Or not so strange. For, after all, these things were his gods! His gods! And of all his treasures of Ming, that ivory, inlaid casket, enshrined beneath enduring fragrance, was most dear to him.

She crowded back the little gasp of hope that parted her lips.

Han looked gentle inquiry at her charge, and Joan spoke, letting her painted scarf slide from her shoulders.

"I feel faint; it's terribly close in here. I want—air!"

The ayah looked uncertain. Joan staked her frail hope upon a certain imperiousness of tone.

"Your master ordered you to care for me; I'm ill. You must take me into the next room."

The half-caste moved her shoulders in slight solicitude. She drew from her robe the great bronze key that secured the teak portals, and inserted it into the massive lock.

Joan passed her, went to the largest, barred aperture, and clinging to the cold steel, breathed deep of the languorous night air. The Eurasian woman hovered close beside her.

"This is better," breathed Joan thankfully, but made no move to return to her former prison.

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Then as an errant breeze lifted her soft, fair hair she shivered.

"The night air is not good; come away," said the ayah in her soft singing.

Joan shook off her gentle touch.

"No; fetch me my scarf. It is chilly."

She waited, not daring to breath, and when the unsuspecting woman did turn to go back for the frail tissue Joan had left upon the divan her knees trembled beneath her. She clung to the iron bars of her prison still, as if to gain coolness and strength from them. And not until the slippered tread of the serving woman sounded on the threshold of the gallery did Joan take advantage of the moment of solitude her ingenuity had accomplished. Then she sped down the inlaid parquetry until she reached the far end of the gallery, where stood enshrined the ivory casket that was the only god Wu Chang Li knew.

The Eurasian saw the profane gesture, and uttered a shrill wail of terror. But she was too late.

"Stand back!" cried Joan, almost as pale as the filigreed ivory treasure she clasped to her bosom, as though it were the Holy Grail. "Or shall I shatter this against these tiles?"

And the ayah, whose gods were Wu Chang Li's, slid impotently to the floor, to wail her anguish, and her surrender.

Rather less than an hour later Wu Chang Li sent his card up to Gilbert Moncton, lately registered as a guest at the Grand Hotel, and very calmly took a seat in the public lounge to await the man he had come to see.

Moncton came down to him—a lean, well-built man whose olive-skinned good looks, still begrimed with the dust of Chinese travel, were haggard with worry—and met him as he would have met the devil himself.

Wu Chang Li expected such a reception, having notified him of his com-

ing, and realizing that the young man must have heard from his mother, on the instant of his arrival, of Joan's mad caprice. Yet even the Manchu had to give Moncton credit for the self-control that was so characteristic of his kind.

"Very glad to see you," Moncton murmured, while his eyes blazed with hostile questioning. "Shall we go into the coffee room? We shall be alone there."

When privacy had been secured the Manchu answered him.

"Thank you. I am grateful indeed to be so well received. Miss Estes is, I assure you, quite safe, and you must soon reassure your mother of that fact."

"I shall—when I know it to be so."

"And your own assurance must depend upon yourself, my friend. We know one another too well of old to waste time in idle bickering. If you will listen to me very carefully, I can tell you in two minutes all that I have to say."

"Go ahead," said the American.

In very fact it needed no more than two minutes for Wu Chang Li to tell Moncton the same thing he had stated to Joan, but with added detail.

"And do not forget who and what I am here in Peking," he counseled Moncton suavely. "It will help you to sounder judgment, perhaps, if you remember."

"You need not remind me," Moncton said from the depths of his torment.

"And your answer? I am sure you will not want to keep Miss Estes in suspense—or durance."

Moncton flung back his head, goaded almost beyond endurance.

"D'you expect a man to make an answer to such a proposition on the toss of a coin, you swine?"

"Please!" almost purred the Manchu, with a deprecating lift of his hand. "You know now what your decision will be."

He spoke with certitude.

"I don't know. I must have time to think," Moncton declared.

"Don't think, man. You know what you will do after all your thinking. There is no escape—for either of us—from my word. I am as eager to let Miss Estes come to you as you are to have her. But not until you seat yourself there at that writing desk and write, at my dictation, the report I wish sent to your company. Believe me, it will be worded so that no withdrawal of yours will be possible. You will say——"

He permitted himself to smile, for with dragging feet Gilbert Moncton had risen and crossed slowly to the shabby desk.

"Whatever you choose to have me say! I'm beaten, and you know it. God, but it was clever of you to hold her as a hostage against my honor!"

The Manchu fitted the tips of his long fingers together with exquisite precision.

"Your honor is much more than a name to you; that I have always known, reticent though you are. It could only be bartered by some very precious thing. And now—write."

Wu Chang Li threw back his lacerated head, eyes narrow slits of thought. Then he commenced to dictate the lie that Gilbert Moncton was to send to his syndicate, and the young American's hand crawled slowly across the sheet of paper which he had drawn toward him.

A great deal of spiritual torment can be encompassed by a very few moments. Before Moncton had finished the first paragraph he had savored the dregs of lost ambition, abandoned hopes, shattered ideals. Yet the terrific sacrifice was leavened curiously by its very completeness.

He remembered one more thing.

"I shall, of course, send in my resignation with this report."

Wu Chang Li gazed at him speculatively.

"I am sorry. Surely you realize that such a procedure would cause—undue comment?"

"But, man, these people believe in me—trust me!"

"So does Miss Estes believe in you—and in your devotion to her," the Manchu reminded him gently.

Moncton passed his hand wearily across his eyes. He did not see the coffee-room door open softly, and the Manchu was standing over him, triumphant, a little intoxicated with the perfection of his plan. So that the ringing words of the intruder startled them both.

"What is he making you do, Gilbert?"

Even the immutable mask that was Wu Chang Li's face underwent a curious, transitory change. It darkened, and he lowered his eyelids, perhaps to hide the sudden acceptance of defeat at this, his highest moment. For it was Joan Estes who stood before them, wrapped closely in her gray, furred cape, beneath whose folds she seemed to clasp carefully, closely some precious thing.

"Joan!" cried the man who loved her beyond all other things.

She drew near enough to glance down at what he had written before he swept her into his arms, incredulous, seemingly, of her reality until he felt her huddled soft against his shoulder.

"That doesn't matter now. Oh, Gilbert, I had to get out of that terrible place—save you from this!"

Wu Chang Li spoke.

"I need not express my surprise—and my dismay—to see you here. Did you put a spell upon my servants, Miss Estes?"

She shook her head at him.

"No. I only remembered what you had said of the woman Han, who guarded me—that your gods were hers, Wu Chang. Do you know what brought me safe—untouched—out of your prison? This!"

She let the gray cloak slide from her, showed him what she held. And when he looked upon the gold and inlay of the ivory casket, that reliquary of his ancestral gods, he said nothing.

She set it very carefully upon the table between them.

"I have not hurt it, this shrine of yours," she told them almost piteously. "Han will tell you how I seized it and threatened to dash it to pieces unless she procured a safe passage out of your house for me, but that is all."

Wu Chang Li's eyelids fluttered gently.

"A shrine—defiled. It is nothing to me now. Keep it, I beg of you, in commemoration of this—episode. You are a very clever young woman. Mr. Moncton has reason to be very grateful to you. Perhaps I had better leave you, so that he may better express his gratitude." He spoke to the man. "And I will bid you good-by now; under the circumstances I do not think our paths will cross again."

"I am very sure they will not," said Moncton.

And with that they found themselves alone.

Not until his lips had lain tenderly on hers for a long moment did Gilbert speak.

"What a fool I've been! But you know—you understand the depths of my love for you, don't you?"

She had only to glance down at the aborted sacrifice to know that.

"Yes. I must have always known. But you were so far from me, Gilbert mine——"

"Too far. I shall never let you be away from me again, dearest. But this afternoon—to-night—where have you been?"

A smile flickered across her lovely mouth. The sharp, poignant sweetness of a remembered fragrance touched her. Mimosa!

"In China! But, Gilbert, I want to go home!"

She knew, as he clasped her in his arms, that her adventuring was done, that glamour and beauty and delight lay with him, wherever he might be, and was content to find it so!



VOTARY

HER moods remember quiet ways
From out the stately past;
A courtesy and dignity
Our age has overcast.

Reverence dwells within her heart,
Candor in her mind,
And hers are steady, lifted eyes
Not even light can blind.

MUNA LEE.



Shadow of Cabanas

By Audrey McMahon

Author of "The Queen's Stairway," etc.

THE tropic sun flamed high in the cloudless sky, casting its scorching rays down on the empty city below, whose white pavements and whiter houses merged into a uniform mass in the noonday glare. On the very threshold of the city the ocean slept, lethargic in the summer heat, gathering together—in its protracted slumber—force with which to combat its enemy, the land. For an instant the hush over the city was absolute—the world holding its breath.

Across the bay from the mainland Cabanas fortress raised grimy walls; raised them a little leaningly by reason of its great age and the many assaults of the unleashed ocean, and so cast a narrow strip of shade along a grateful green patch below.

In this shadow stood a woman, her tall, lithe body, her fair hair and untanned skin proclaiming her a daughter of some less-ardent land, yet her full, curving lips and tempestuous, passion-laden eyes giving the lie to this moderation. She was gazing across the bay, anxiety and eagerness vying for supremacy in her glance. As her eyes fell upon a small craft which was heading direct for the old wharf at the foot of the jetty, her anxiety vanished, and eagerness, but ill-concealed, took full possession of her.

Out of the boat leaped a man—tall, slender, dark. There was no conflict in the face or nature of Rodrigo Nuñez.

His every lithe gesture proclaimed him what he was—a creature of the tropics, whose blood was easily stirred to passion, to lust, to war; a lord of his small creation, the tyrant of a moment. He strode up the little incline now, impatient steps bearing him swiftly toward the slim, white figure in the slim, dark shadow.

"Ah, Doña Isabella," he cried, lifting pale fingers to his lips and holding them there a long moment. "I am late and desolated."

"You are indeed late, caballero"—Isabelle's voice was tender—"but desolated you are not in the very least. Indeed I should punish you by leaving at once."

"But that—you will not do." Rodrigo released her hand and looked at her through half-shut eyes.

"And what," asked Isabelle, "gives you such security?"

"Well, since there is nothing to leave me for," laughed Rodrigo, "I am inclined to be certain of your continued presence. Unless, indeed, you count that young, tennis-playing husband of yours as—something."

"Ah, let us not speak of Dwight!"

"Let us, by all means, not," drawled Rodrigo. "Let us speak rather of ourselves—a far more interesting topic. And let us also speak a little of love."

"Of love!" Isabelle laughed shortly. "Young pagan! What do you know of love?"

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"Enough, Isabella, since it is by very love of you that I am consumed," murmured Rodrigo.

"A pretty speech," said Isabelle coldly. "Are you rehearsing for your little American?"

"You choose to misunderstand." Rodrigo flushed darkly. "I speak to you—of love. To the Señorita Cynthia I speak of trivial matters—the patter for a young girl."

"Truly, Rodrigo, you are quite admirable!" Isabelle laughed. "And to whom, pray, do you speak of marriage?"

"To no one as yet. I am not hasty. But in time I shall speak of that to Señor Van Anden, the father of the girl. That is as it should be."

"And why," asked Isabelle, her face darkening, "why not speak of it to me?"

"To you! But, Doña Isabella, you are jesting! You already have one husband!"

"True, my Rodrigo. And before Dwight I already had another, as you say. It is not necessarily a permanent arrangement."

"Yes; but, Isabella, you do not understand. I would speak to you of love—and that is romance; and you would have me speak of marriage—and that is business."

"And is it business in the case of Cynthia Van Anden?" Isabelle's eyes were narrowed. "They do say that she is very, very poor."

"That I, too, know," began Rodrigo, "yet—"

"Even that her father, the distinguished ex-senator, has got himself so deeply into debt at the races last spring that he could not leave the island now—if he would."

"Exaggerated, my dear. Nothing holds the Señor Van Anden but a debt of honor—and his word to remain until it is discharged. And I have offered, when the fall comes, to put him in the

way of—what do you say?—recouping?"

"So it is to *you* he owes the money!" Isabelle's eyes flashed angrily. "And yet you try to make me believe that this marriage is a matter of—business! Strange business indeed! How much of all this does Cynthia know?"

"But nothing, I trust, as befits a young girl. And it is indeed business—even though she is poor as you say. For I wish to bring into my house a bride whose family is proud as mine, alas, is lowly. My father was a peon. He had brains, ambition; he made money. He gave me everything in his power—education, freedom, wealth. But what he did not possess, that he could not bestow. And I am determined that my children shall achieve the social position I have lacked—through their mother. Is not that business?"

"You can speak thus of a girl who has not consented to become your wife, to a woman who has not consented—"

"To be my dearest love," Rodrigo bent his head and smiled into Isabelle's turbulent eyes. "Has not consented as yet, Isabella."

But the glow in the amber eyes had died and Isabelle faced the handsome Cuban coldly.

"Not as yet," she repeated, "and perhaps—never." And turning from him she walked swiftly down toward the mooring.

Though her words were final and her mien proud, Rodrigo did not appear to be downcast. Indeed, he hummed lightly as he watched her boatman row her across the bay. A woman of his own race would have glanced back; would have, perhaps, waved a forgiving hand. This American made no sign. Yet Rodrigo knew that underneath the white frock her heart was racing madly; he guessed that her full, nether lip was caught between small, white teeth, that pointed nails were chastising the soft palms of her hands.

Isabelle Rawlinson was a by-product of modernity. Her twenty-eight years included two divorces and three husbands, of whom the newest was Dwight Rawlinson. For all the masculinity of his twenty-five years, he had been lured into the matrimonial net which the recent exit of a brief tenant had left vacant. Lured easily enough, for Isabelle was always lovely, and when she so desired she could be very beautiful.

She had been beautiful that evening in June when first he met her—beautiful and more than bewildering to Dwight who, in spite of a solid foundation of family tradition backed by ample wealth, was yet that most unsophisticated object—just a boy. He had been flattered that she preferred him to so many older, more distinguished men who seemed one and all eager claimants for her favor.

There was no actual proposal, there was absolutely no engagement, but, there very distinctly was a wedding, albeit a hasty, semilegal and wholly irreligious affair performed in the office of a bored and somnolent registrar. It was a poor substitute for the social function Dwight might have offered his bride, but it was quite obviously better than no ceremony at all.

Isabelle was entirely aware that there had very nearly been no ceremony, and that the questioning of the license clerk, which disclosed the unpalatable facts of her former marital ventures, came close to being the Waterloo of her new undertaking. Only a tradition which cried that he could not, at this eleventh hour, desert her, had held Dwight at her side before the little grilled window.

But after the travesty was completed Dwight turned about and, to Isabelle's consternation, insisted upon precipitate flight. Face his stern and patrician mother with this, his bride, he eventually must, but at that moment the ordeal loomed too terrible. And all

Isabelle's pleading, and entreaty—and scolding—could not swerve him.

They compromised on Havana, which is a halfway land for so many people, and hardly had they landed before Isabelle began to lay plans for a very speedy return. It did not enter into her plans to miss the season in New York. At least it had not entered into her plans—until the day she met Rodrigo. Whereupon she began to wonder whether, after all, the season in the Cuban capital might not be more diverting.

But Dwight, who wandered disconsolately between the country-club bar—toward which he had no particular leaning—and the tennis courts on which it was far too hot to play—Dwight was very unhappy.

Marrying Isabelle, he fully realized, had been the aberration of a moment. She no longer cared for him—if, indeed, she ever had—and she was entirely frank about her indifference. It became ever more difficult for him to face the ordeal of returning with her to New York where she might flaunt her disdain of him in his mother's very eyes. Better than that it was to wander with indefinite aimlessness between the bar, toward which he had no leaning, and the tennis courts, on which it was too hot to play.

He came out onto the shaded veranda of the country club now, a tall, athletic, serious lad, whose woebegone eyes and drooping lips were oddly at variance with his strong, muscular young frame. It was his intention, so much as he had any, to cross the porch, but in the very path of his steps there was a wicker chair, and within the wicker chair sat Cynthia Van Anden. Soft color flooded her cheeks as she spied Dwight, and quick pleasure flooded his eyes as they rested upon her.

Here was a girl—here indeed was *the* girl! Dwight knew, but did not admit the knowledge. Indeed, it was with

elaborate casual friendliness that he approached the trim, linen-clad figure before him.

"Lo, Cynthia!" He towered above her. "Been playing tennis?"

"Why, no, Dwight." The girl turned frank brown eyes toward his. "Been waiting for you."

"Oh, I say!" It came frightfully close to being too much for Dwight, and he shifted uneasily from foot to foot. "Got to hurry along. Isabelle——"

Cynthia smiled indulgently, and pulled toward her a chair which stood close by.

"Isabelle is due here presently. She's asked me to have tea with her," she said gently, "so you won't have to go after her, you see. And Dwight, there is something I want to ask you—to do for me—if you will."

"Something for you?" Dwight sank into the chair and stared hungrily at the girl beside him. "Why, surest thing you know," he said eagerly. "What is it?"

"You're awfully dear," said Cynthia suddenly, and patted his sleeve with her small brown hand. Dwight longed to capture that little paw and hold it fast forever. He clenched his hands and gazed fixedly across the glaring tennis courts.

"What was it you wanted?" he asked gruffly.

"Why, Dwight!" Cynthia's eyes widened. "How abrupt you are. I won't ask you if you don't want——"

"But I *do* want," he interrupted her intensely. "That's just it. Spring it, Cynthia!"

"Well!"—Cynthia's eyes grew thoughtful—"I'll have to tell you a lot of things first," she said hesitantly. "Personal things."

"But you don't have to tell me anything if you'd rather not," Dwight assured her quickly. "Just say what it is you want, and I'll do it."

"Dwight"—Cynthia was smiling, and to his horror and his dismay the boy saw that her eyes were full of tears—"you *are* a dear!"

"I—it's about dad, of course," said Cynthia after a moment. "Dad and all that money he lost."

"So you know?" Dwight did not seem surprised.

"Of course I know," Cynthia laughed bitterly. "How could I help knowing? I'm not blind, am I?"

"Not exactly," Dwight laughed. It wasn't funny, but he couldn't help it—he laughed anyway. She wasn't blind, to be sure. How much, he wondered, did she know? Not only about her father but about him—him and Isabelle and him and her?

"You see, we had a little money," Cynthia was explaining carefully. "It was mine, that mother left me, but of course I was quite willing for dad to have it. But he lost most of it in some sort of a mining scheme. I'm afraid he hasn't much business sense."

Dwight nodded. Frederic Van Anden had the business acumen of a child. He was charming, he was cultured, he was patrician, he was distinctly and almost pathetically lovable, but astute in the affairs of men he was most emphatically not.

"It was his idea that we come to Havana and try the races," continued Cynthia. "Naturally I didn't put any stock in it myself."

Dwight smiled. He could jolly well imagine she didn't, with those level brown eyes, and that serene, thoughtful brow.

"I'll bet you take after your mother," he said suddenly.

"Why, I do!" Cynthia looked at him quickly. "What makes you——"

"Oh, nothing," murmured Dwight. "Sorry I interrupted. Tell me the rest."

"Well, the rest is pretty much common knowledge," said Cynthia ruefully. "Mind you, I'm not blaming dad the

least bit. He couldn't help it, you know. And then I have enjoyed being down here. But now it's so hot, and besides it isn't common sense to believe his luck will be better in the fall, in spite of all the things Señor Nuñez says."

"Ah, Nuñez!" Dwight looked up sharply. There were rumors afloat—

"You don't like him." Cynthia leaned forward. "But when we first came here he was charming to us—you've no idea how gracious. He smoothed things for us—got us into the club here somehow without its costing us anything—did all sorts of delightful things. I—I began to really like him, you know, until I discovered—"

"What?" breathed Dwight.

"Oh, that he wanted to get us under his claws." Cynthia sighed. It would have pricked the bubble of Rodrigo's complacency to have heard this young person calmly diagnose his motives. "He wants to—to marry me."

"But, Cynthia!" Dwight was horrified, although he had known as much right along. But to hear the words from her own lips—there seemed to him to be something terrible in that. "You—you wouldn't, would you?"

"Of course not, stupid!" She smiled slightly as she spoke, but her voice was serious. "I'd starve—or die—first."

"Cynthia!" Dwight leaned forward earnestly. "I have plenty of money. Won't you let me—help?"

"Thanks, Dwight! I knew you would offer me that. But I couldn't accept. There's Isabelle, you see."

There was indeed Isabelle. Before Dwight's eyes there flashed a picture of his wife, beautiful, disdainful and hard. That was it—Isabelle was adamant. Whereas this young creature at his side was soft, soft, for all her singleness of purpose and severity of code. Violently Dwight tore his thoughts away from this forbidden path. That way lay madness—sweet madness.

"However, I shall soon have the

money, anyway," Cynthia continued brightly. "That's the very point. I have an uncle back home who is quite wealthy, and I've written and asked him to lend it to me. He is a bachelor, with a houseful of books, and I've offered to come back and catalogue them all for him, to repay him what I will owe. He wanted me to do it last winter, but dad was restless, and I couldn't let him roam off alone."

"But your father—"

"Oh, dad will be all right when he hasn't anything. It's only when he has money to—to invest that he needs watching. He'll be glad to get this off his mind, and to go back home and rest. I'm not in the least worried about him."

"I see. But you said there was something you wanted me to do, Cynthia. What is it?"

"Dwight, if you would—I want you to be with me when I give Rodrigo Nuñez the money. I—I don't trust him. He might refuse to take it, or something. Will you?"

"Why, of course!" Dwight spoke eagerly. "But see here, Cynthia, wouldn't it be better if you just let me attend to the whole show? No need for you to mess about in it."

"I thought you would suggest that." Cynthia smiled. "But there's every need for me to mess about in it, as I see it. It's my mess—mine and dad's. I don't want you to do it for me. I want you to help, if you will."

"You know I will, although I would far rather—"

"You would rather I didn't interfere, Rodrigo Nuñez would rather I didn't know anything about it, and my own darling dad would rather I didn't know anything at all! What passive creatures you men would like to make of us women! However, I know what I know, and I'll do what I think I should—and that's that."

"I suppose so!" Dwight sighed. "And

do you know how much your father owes this man?"

"I do," Cynthia smiled tenderly. "Poor dad has the figures on the back of his passport, for all the world to see. And I've added a couple of hundred in my request to Uncle Ambrose, in case dad should borrow some more—and also to leave us enough to get home with. Now are you satisfied?"

Dwight nodded.

"I have to be, though I'd rather you kept out of it. But," he added hurriedly, as he saw that Cynthia was about to protest, "I'll do as you say. You let me know when you are ready, and I'll get——"

"Just what is it you will get, Dwight?" Isabelle's languid drawl cut into the boy's words. "A chair for your wife, perhaps? Cynthia and I are about to have tea."

"Why—why, of course!" Dwight jumped to his feet, his face flaming. "Do take mine, Isabelle. I can't stay. I—I've a man to see."

Somehow he got away, and two pairs of eyes followed his tall, young figure down the path.

"Poor lad," murmured Isabelle, summoning a waiter, "he has no conception of how to deal with a—er—delicate situation. Will you have tea, Cynthia, or something longer—and stronger?"

"Oh, tea!" Cynthia sighed and leaned back in her chair. "Iced, though, as a concession to the weather."

"It is hot!" Isabelle's eyes were pensive. "Cuba in summer——"

"There might be worse places," murmured Cynthia dreamily.

"Do you think so, really? I can't imagine how. But it is fortunate you feel that way about it since, if what I have heard is true, you will be spending more than a little time here."

"And what have you heard, dear Isabelle," asked Cynthia, "the veracity of which you doubt?"

"Just that you are shortly to be

betrothed to our handsome young Cuban friend," said Isabelle suavely. "I was told in greatest confidence, of course."

"Really!" Cynthia arched her eyebrows. "And who gave you this—advance information, might I ask?"

"Rodrigo himself, the dear lad." Isabelle raised aloft the tall, slim glass which a waiter had just set before her. "May I drink to your happiness Cynthia, since you admit that it is—advance information?"

"It is advance misinformation," said Cynthia angrily, her cheeks flaming.

"So?" Isabelle's lips curved. "I fear, then, that there will be much disappointment in many places. Nevertheless, I will drink to your happiness, if not in this union, then in some other. You do not mind?"

"No," said Cynthia dully, closing her eyes wearily, "I do not mind."

Nothing is more trying to youth than inaction. As the days grew a little cooler and summer merged slowly into early fall, the strain of waiting to hear from her uncle began to tell on Cynthia. When steamer after steamer came into port without the longed-for letter, she grew more and more quiet, and there came to her young face a wan look which spoke loudly of long and wakeful nights, of bitter and secret tears.

It crept into Dwight's heart, this drawn look on Cynthia's face, and seemed to bore deep down into him with a persistent and constant ache. There was little he could do, and so much he longed to do—little he could say, and so many words surging to his lips!

Meanwhile Isabelle, armed with Cynthia's own denial of any alliance between her and the Cuban, was permitting her desire to win Rodrigo's love to have full sway. And in order that he might the sooner come to the realization that the girl was not for him, Isabelle urged him to ask for her hand in

marriage. But Rodrigo shrewdly decided to wait the opening of the races, on which day he had determined that Mr. Van Anden should immerse himself still farther in the slough of his indebtedness.

So Isabelle was obliged to become patient—a thing wholly outside of her nature. She was learning, for the first time in her tempestuous career, that it is sometimes necessary to wait, and as the days passed by and she saw Rodrigo revolving almost constantly about Cynthia, she learned that it is frequently necessary to suffer.

But her secret certainty in the outcome of it all buoyed her up. Cynthia would not have Rodrigo, and she, Isabelle—ah, she would. Quite naturally he would turn to her when the other woman failed him. That would be her triumph, her recompense for having so long held herself aloof. As for Dwight—oh, well, when the time came, Dwight would not matter.

The morning of the opening of the races dawned clear and beautiful. The weather was now at its best, a best so resplendent that it was difficult to remember the torrid days just past. Only the men of the sea looked askance at the wind-swept clouds, and listened suspiciously to the slow, low rumbling of the ocean. Its surface was still serene and the growl seemed to issue from its very vitals. The men of the sea sighed and moved their most precious possessions to the attics of their houses or to the dwellings of relatives who lived inland; sighed and drew their boats into the harbor, letting seemingly perfect fishing days pass in idleness.

But the races, being a matter of the land only, opened blithely to resounding music. The president and his señora graced the assemblage with their presence. In the presidential box they sat in state, surrounded by other obese and important dignitaries, while below a swarm of exquisitely gowned women

and attentive caballeros paraded to and fro.

The season had begun. For two weeks past the incoming steamers had been laden with passengers. New fashions vied with new beauties; the couturiers had sent their choicest models; the mamas of society were proudly displaying such of their female offspring as were ready for the matrimonial mart.

A very fascinating demimondaine had traveled all the way from Paris to triumph over a new audience, and her little poodle, her big black servant, her little cavalier and her huge emerald cabochon all came in for their share of attention. Mamas passing her by pulled the young daughters closer to maternal skirts, the while two pairs of eyes stared avidly at every detail of her gorgeous white-velvet frock.

The season had begun. In the paddocks grooms and owners, jockeys and stable hands swarmed about the particular bit of horseflesh which signified bread and butter and glory to them. New friendships were cemented, old enmities renewed, the exploits of the summer recounted, embroidered, exaggerated. The father of a baby boy was congratulated loudly with much slapping of shoulders, the parent of a girl child consoled with sincere sympathy and earnest hopes for better luck next time. The season had begun.

But two people in the bantering throng seemed to be oblivious of the picturesque procession. In the very thick of the crowd, protected by their happy and aimless chatter, Cynthia and Dwight had found isolation. The girl's eyes were sparkling, and her lips were trembling with excitement, but her voice was low and contained as she spoke.

"It's come, Dwight," she said rapidly. "I have it here. Just in time."

"Thank goodness!" Dwight was tense as she. "And now——"

"I want to get dad away before he

borrow any more, and before the horses begin to run. The excitement is so—so bad for him. He is hardly himself."

Dwight longed to put comforting arms about the small, white figure before him, but he clenched his hands at the thought.

"I have asked Rodrigo to take me to the club for a—a drink," continued Cynthia. "It will be practically deserted to-day so, of course, he is delighted. He says we have ample time to get back before the races begin. Dad will stay here—his heart can't stand the speed at which we will drive. But you——"

"Yes?" Dwight was tense.

"You can drive even faster, can you not? And get there first?"

"I can," said Dwight rapidly. "And then——"

"Go to the green room, and walk through the farthest window out onto the veranda. You should be able to see perfectly from there, and to hear everything Rodrigo and I say—and particularly when I call you."

"But, Cynthia, it isn't safe for you!"

"Oh, please, *please!* We have so little time. There is Rodrigo coming toward us now. Will you—won't you?"

Dwight took Cynthia's fingers in his, and pressed her hand quickly.

"Count on me, my dear," he said rapidly. "I'll be—outside the room."

Though he drove the half mile which separated the race track from the country club at breakneck speed, Dwight had just time to make his way to the veranda outside the green room before he spied the approaching figures of Cynthia and Rodrigo.

"So it was not a refresco you desired after all, señorita," the Cuban was saying. His face wore a puzzled expression. "Why, then——"

"I desired an explanation, señor." Cynthia's voice was cool. "I wish to know why you told Mrs. Rawlinson that we are to be married."

Dull color flooded Rodrigo's cheeks at Cynthia's words, and his hands clenched with quick anger.

"So!" he said sibilantly.

"What makes you so certain of our wedding, Señor Nuñez?" Cynthia pursued the subject. "Even before you have my consent?"

For an instant Rodrigo hesitated, but Cynthia would not be denied.

"Your father," he said sullenly, "has given his assent."

"When?" asked Cynthia quickly. "What did dad say?"

"Just before the races, señorita. He said that he would not oppose the match if—if you desired it."

And you call that assent!" Cynthia laughed dryly. "But let us suppose, Don Rodrigo, that I do not wish it. What happens then?"

"Why, nothing at all, little señorita." Out on the veranda Dwight clenched his hands at the insolence of the Cuban's tone. "For you will wish it. Your father owes me a sum of money. It is, señorita, a debt of honor. A debt which no gentleman would leave unpaid, but which, alas, the Señor Van Anden is not in a position to liquidate."

"And so you assume——"

"But no, señorita, pardon me! I assume nothing. I merely suggest—very humbly—that you accept the cancellation of this debt—this debt of honor—as a betrothal gift from me. That is all."

"But if he were able to pay it——"

The Cuban said nothing, but the gesture of his shoulders was eloquent.

"Don Rodrigo"—Cynthia's voice rang out clear as a bell—"I can accept neither your offer of marriage nor yet your betrothal gift. But neither can I leave my father's debt—which you call a debt of honor—unpaid. So I beg that you accept this money, and we will part—friends."

With a quick gesture she took a roll of bills from her purse and placed them

on a table in front of Rodrigo. For several moments there was silence in the green room; then the Cuban took the money into his hand.

"Does the Señor Van Anden know anything of this?" he asked, his voice low.

"Why, no." Cynthia seemed baffled at the question.

"So!" Rodrigo surveyed her thoughtfully, while he pocketed the money without giving it a second glance. "You—you borrowed it, I presume?" he continued.

"I did." Cynthia flung back her head.

"And this is all you have." It was not a question.

Cynthia nodded slowly, her eyes thoughtful.

"Then," said Rodrigo quickly, stepping closer to her, "we will announce the betrothal as I had planned, at the presidential ball this evening. That should be an auspicious occasion."

"But how about the money? I paid——"

"You paid? What did you pay? I know nothing of any money. And your father knows nothing of it, either. You said so yourself but a moment ago."

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that you would take my money and then force me——"

"I take from you nothing, my dear, that I will not return manifold after the wedding. As to the force—a little is frequently necessary. Some day you will thank me. Until then——"

"Dwight," called Cynthia clearly, "will you come in here, please?"

It is always a revelation for a woman to see the man she loves do battle for her, whether he wage his warfare with gleaming weapons or with valiant fists, as Dwight was doing. The Cuban, lithe as he was, was yet no match for this muscular and intensely alert young American, and it was not very long before he very distinctly began to get the worst of the fray—not long, either, be-

fore his hand crept stealthily toward his belt where the dull glint of the handle of a machete was barely visible.

"Look out!" Cynthia's cry reached the battling pair. "He has a knife!"

There was that in her voice which gave both men pause, and in the infinitesimal lull which punctuated their strange battle, Rodrigo's eyes gleamed evilly.

"So, you would protect your lover, eh?" he snarled, baring his teeth. "You hypocritical, plaster-of-paris saint. I would not marry you now, if you begged on your knees. No, I would not marry you if——"

But the sentence was never finished, for Dwight had recovered from the momentary stupor into which Cynthia's words seemed to have plunged him, and now he sprang at his adversary, his aim secure, his hands merciless.

"Dwight, Dwight!" Cynthia was begging. "Let him be. You'll kill him."

"He deserves to die." The boy raised anguished eyes toward her. "He deserves worse than death."

"Oh, please come away, please!" Cynthia clung to his arm. "He'll never bother us again. And I want to get back to dad and tell him everything is all right. He will be wondering where I am, what has happened. Dwight, please!"

"Very well, Cynthia." Dwight loosed his hold on the other man's throat, and with a groan Rodrigo sank to the tiled floor. "But that fellow isn't half punished, you know."

"Oh, he's more than punished." Cynthia was hovering on tears. "More than punished, Dwight, thanks to you. And now—good-by."

"Good-by, Cynthia?" Dwight passed his hand over his eyes, as though to clear his vision, and then looked searchingly at the girl before him. "Did you say—good-by?"

"Yes, Dwight." Her voice was scarcely more than a whisper. "I'm go-

ing back to get dad now, and tell him that his debt of honor is paid and that we are free to leave for home to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Cynthia! You can't mean—to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said slowly, "I do mean to-morrow. I made reservations this afternoon before we went to the track."

"But, Cynthia"—Dwight's voice was hoarse—"what—what is to become of me?"

He had not intended to say it, and now that the words were spoken he stood there, horrified at himself.

"Oh, Cynthia," he cried, "I shouldn't have said that! I didn't mean to—I didn't want to. You will forgive me, won't you, please?"

For a moment Cynthia was silent, and her gaze roamed over the veranda, out across the rolling slopes which surrounded the country club, but in her eyes there seemed to be a vision of things far away.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said at length. "Good-by—dear."

When the stage is set for drama the principal actors are frequently unaware of the rôles they are playing. To Cynthia's tear-dimmed eyes the receding shores of Cuba were just—a land she was leaving behind, and the ache in her heart just—a pain she must learn to endure. So, too, the steward's words, as he brought her a rug, were just words to be quickly forgotten.

"Fortunate we got out so early this morning, miss," was what the man said, as he tucked the rug securely about her feet. "This is cyclone weather we're leaving behind."

Cyclone weather! It meant nothing to Cynthia, whose cyclone was in the upheaval of her mind, but who saw the calm port of her uncle's home ahead. It meant nothing to Dwight whose cyclone was in his heart, and who did not care whether the sun ever shone again.

It meant nothing to Isabelle whose cyclone was of the senses, as she stood in the shadow of Cabañas, waiting for the man to whom she could now give her love. And it meant least of all to Rodrigo whose cyclone was his hate, and who, with machete thrust deep into his belt, was even now hastening across the choppy waters of the bay to meet this woman who had frustrated him in his ambition.

But to the wary people of the sea, who had moved their possessions these many days, it was the fulfillment of a prophecy, and they waited, not without a certain eagerness, to see the maddened ocean take, after long waiting, its toll of the land.

Higher and higher it rose, a gigantic, murderous beast; over the puny wall of the Malecon it hurled itself, over and again over—foaming at the mouth it was, a maddened beast—ravaging the shores which had denied it these many months, breaking down the barrier it detested, capsizing a boat here, crushing a boat there. Hard against the old Cabañas fortress it hurled itself, lapping the feet of the woman who lay beneath its shadow, washing away the stains on the grass under her body.

Furiously it swirled into the mouth of the bay, lifting to a dizzy height the boat of the ancient boatman who had ventured to defy its wrath—for many golden pesos. To dizzy heights it lifted the little craft, while the old man trembled and prayed and the young man trembled and cursed. And to no less dizzy depths it plunged them, stilling forever praying and blaspheming lips alike.

For many days and nights it waged its war with the land and the people thereof, until finally, sated, it withdrew again into its lair. And the men of the sea, who are also the people of the land, came out from their hiding places, and proceeded to rebuild their puny wall, and moved their possessions back

from the houses of their cousins and their aunts, and swaggered along the Malecon once more. And they grew carefree and ribald again, for it would be many months before the ogre would threaten them anew, and perhaps the next time, their wall would be sufficiently strong to withstand him!

But Dwight wandered along the Malecon alone, and the somber light in his eyes did not lighten. He stood often and looked into the deep waters of the ocean, and into the deep well of his forgiveness, and rejoiced that Isabelle had found peace from her turbulent desires. But he did not leave the island for many months—not until a certain letter came from the north-land which was also his home.

No one can tell what words were written in that letter, for no other eyes than Dwight's ever saw them, but they must have been precious indeed, for his eyes lighted magically as he read them—lighted at last and stayed alight. And

the little, gray-tinted paper which bore the words he placed very close to his heart.

He stood in the stern of the boat which was carrying him to the north, and as long as he could see he kept his glance on a little strip of shade thrown by the leaning walls of the ancient fortress. As long as he could see the shadow he kept his eyes so, and his thoughts, full of pity, on the woman who was dead.

But when a swerve of the vessel put the mainland between him and Cabañas, he walked slowly to the bow of the boat, and dreamily looked ahead. Fresh, salty spray splashed into his face as he stood there, and seemed to wash it clear of all the grief which had lined it. And ahead of the chugging steamer, so valiantly plowing its path through the water, leaped his thoughts, until they found the girl who was waiting, her eyes a beacon of hope, her arms a haven of peace.



FOR A VERY GREAT LADY

HERE, where the wind is at last quiet, where there is only
Dusk, and a low star, and the long, lonely
Plaint of the coyote pack, and the hushed greeting
Of wave come homing to sand, of water with water meeting—

Here you will come, to the pines, and the lake, and the low house by it;
You have been all things, known every joy, but quiet;
You whom the world loves as a flame and a mad voice, bringing
Beauty, rebellious and dark, but never peace with your singing.

You will come home at last, to the way of the hills and the river,
When the wind is hushed, and the pines, and the aspens quiver
In a dream of wind, and the west is a crumbling ember.
The world will forget you soon. We will always remember.

TED OLSON.



Hoytie Has the Papers

By Grace Stair

Author of "The Widow's Might,"
"Playing Up to Hoytie," etc.



FOR once in her life Hoytie Emden had arrived at the club on time for a luncheon engagement.

"What a pity!" she soliloquized, as she sat waiting in the ladies' lounge. "There'll only be Nance Leonard to come and find me so prompt. Tactical error! I should have planned for a larger audience."

At the head of a short flight of steps leading to the men's part of the club, the door opened and a young man came through. He stopped an instant to survey the room, discovering Hoytie Emden with a light of satisfaction in his pale eyes. Moving forward with nervously controlled steps, he went directly down toward her chair.

"How do you do, Mrs. Emden? You're looking awfully fit," he announced, in an ingratiating tone that somehow exaggerated his air of the complete man about town.

"Good morning, Jay," she answered dryly, looking up as he bowed formally. He had been prepared to kiss her hand in the approved Continental fashion,

calculated to flatter her; his only difficulty was that there had been no hand extended.

Undaunted by her lack of cordiality, he inquired cheerfully if he might sit down beside her.

"I'd hoped there would have been a letter from you this morning, in answer to the one I sent two days ago," he remarked.

"I told you before, Jay, that my answer was final. It's entirely up to you now," she replied in the same impersonally frigid tone. "I thought I'd made that perfectly plain."

"But I thought you understood that I was only asking for a little more time," he began, fumbling in the pocket of his dark-gray coat for his cigarette case.

Hoytie rose abruptly.

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me, Jay." Without giving him time to rise, she walked serenely in front of him and away. His suave affability inwardly disturbed, he noted the contrast of manner in the gay friendliness with which

she welcomed Mrs. Leonard, who had just come through the revolving street door.

Up in the dining room Hoytie and Nancy Leonard were settled at a bright window table when Jay Parkinson arrived in the doorway, now accompanied by a young woman whose loveliness produced the astounding effect of a streaking sunbeam in the subdued luxuriance of the room, and drew all eyes upon her. Every bright thread in her hair, partly concealed though it was by her small, brown hat, every sparkling flash of her eager eyes lighted the half-dark of the entrance.

"My word!" breathed Hoytie in ungrudging admiration. "There's a type for you! Look at that girl! She stands there like fluid gold. She makes my sort of blue-eyed, yellow-haired female look just ordinary."

Her companion glanced discreetly in the direction Hoytie had indicated. A wise smile lingered about her lips as she turned her head back again.

"Where in Heaven's name did that lank, unattractive cub of Susan Parkinson's ever pick up such a glorious creature?" Hoytie was inquiring.

Mrs. Leonard continued to smile.

"Why, don't you know, dear? That's Laurel Spencer, the latest acquisition of the Trois Artes! Mrs. Parkinson put her in; and the girls had to take her, even if there were a few broken noses on account of her beauty and talent. She's going to have the star part in one of their next plays. You know Susan runs the club to suit herself."

"Where does the girl come from?" persisted Hoytie. "I've never heard of her. Who's her family?"

"Family?" echoed Nancy in tranquil amusement. "She's like Topsy, socially, I guess. She works in the same office with Jay. That's all any one knows."

"Oho! And Mamma Parkinson sponsors her for smart amateur theatricals! Spoiled darling's influence, eh?" Hoytie

opened her eyes staggeringly wide, and nodded her head with a twinkling wink. "Must be something back of it!"

All through luncheon Hoytie conducted a circumspect observation of the beautiful Laurel and her escort. Once she saw Jay slip a small jeweler's box across the table to the girl, who pushed it back as firmly, with a positive shake of her head in refusal.

Consequently Hoytie planned to attend the next performance of the Trois Artes, to be given as usual in the exquisite little theater on the vast Parkinson estate. She invited Ted van Doran to go with her—Ted, the handsome young brother of her maid of honor, who had always adored Hoytie quite as much as he did his own sister. Since Mrs. Emden's widowhood he had constituted himself her especial cavalier.

Hoytie murmured greetings right and left as they went down the aisle of the small auditorium, its floor tiled with big squares of black-and-white marble. Ted gazed with appreciation at the beautiful interior walled in tangerine, with hangings of deep-sea blue. There were panels against the soft tinting to portray the evolution of the theater from earliest times: a Grecian amphitheater; strolling players of medieval days; a royal French playhouse. Daringly executed, they were the work of a famous painter who had recently been imported by Susan Parkinson to redecorate the place.

"I see you're up to your old tricks," laughed Ted as they sat down. "But why do you think I belong in the bald-headed row?"

"My dear young man, you'll thank me when the evening is over," declared Hoytie in prim pretense. "I've brought you down here to get what will be, in vulgar parlance, an eyeful!"

"Which means," he interpreted sagely, "that there's something doing that you don't want to miss."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that,"

demurred Hoytie. "I'm only anxious to see how intoxicated you'll get at your first sight of a beautiful golden fizz that will come walking out before your very eyes."

He started to speak, but a faint, melodious chime heralded the beginning of the program. As the audience grew hushed, the voluminous curtains parted to reveal the interior of a baronial castle, a tapestried hall with tall candles lighted on either side of a great, carved chair at the right where a man sat staring moodily before him, his profile to the stage. In the background was the balustrade of a terrace and beyond this a soft, midnight sky pricked with star points. At the extreme left was another high candlestick lighting the way along the terrace where there came presently a slender figure in a shimmering yellow robe and the peaked, veiled headdress of the eleventh century. She stood for a moment with a graceful hand on the massive railing, gazing wistfully beyond the silent man into the distance.

An involuntary burst of applause paid tribute to her beauty, and under cover of the sound Hoytie heard Ted gasp:

"My God! Who's she?"

"Laurel Spencer—the golden fizz!" returned Hoytie melodramatically in his ear. "And you recognize Jay in the medieval dinner clothes!"

Then as the girl advanced a trifle beyond the candlestick, a vigorous draft of air from the wings belled out the tapestry on the left wall, and, blowing it against the iron standard, knocked the taper into the gauzy folds of the headdress. From this the train of the girl's filmy gown caught like tinder and the artificial vines along the papier-mâché balustrade were like so many fuses to carry the flame. Some one had disobeyed orders and opened a window or the stage door while this set was on, letting the fatal rush of rising wind sweep in. Now the draft was shut off from the wings, but instantly a panicky

person at the back of the theater had opened a wide door there and the strong, cool current surged into the auditorium. Back stage the draft rose again, and the flames flared.

With the first spurt of the fire, Hoytie and Ted were on their feet. At once the theater was in confusion, though the crowd, controlling nerves and voices, was comparatively quiet. High above the soft, menacing sound of the flames and the rapid shuffling footsteps of the retreating audience rang Jay Parkinson's terrified voice:

"For God's sake, let me get out of this!"

He had seen Ted van Doran's flying leap onto the stage where Laurel Spencer had had enough presence of mind to back into a heavy velours curtain against the wall, in an attempt to smother the flaming headdress which she could not reach. Unmindful of anything, Jay had dodged Ted's lunge, jumped to the floor beside Hoytie, and streaked past her without a glance.

On the stage Ted was now wrapping Laurel in the topcoat he had seized as he sprang to the rescue. The girl's own quickness had prevented her from being too badly burned, though by the time Ted reached her side fear and pain were rapidly overcoming her fortitude. Fortunately the setting was so full of heavy materials that the first flares were the most dangerous. Back stage the other properties were blazing high, cutting off retreat there. But strangely enough this spot was for the moment comparatively safe, excepting for the smoke and sparks. Exit was impossible at the rear. Then Ted heard Hoytie's guiding cry:

"Come back this way, Ted! I'm waiting to help you! There's still time to get out."

There flashed through Ted's mind an admiration for her brave forgetfulness of self, even as he regained the floor level with Laurel Spencer, whose golden

beauty had been in danger, held in his arms.

Outside a volunteer company had roped off a fire line, and a thin, ineffectual stream of water from the estate's only piece of apparatus played over the flaming wings of the doomed building. For the wind, slightly increasing in velocity, was driving the leaping tongues of fire into the interior of the auditorium where the painted wooden seats were first-rate inflammable stuff. So much paint and varnish and sizing had been put on the sets and flies and decorations that pungent smells mounted through the crisp air and the night was filled with sharp cracklings. Into this came Hoytie and Ted, with his now unconscious burden.

Some of the amateur actors and actresses, including Jay, in the character garments of their parts, hurried forward.

"Let me have her," commanded Jay authoritatively. "I'll take her to the house."

"You just lead the way," Ted declared grimly. "I've got her all right. Have you sent for a doctor?"

At the house Mrs. Parkinson joined them, fussily inquiring for Jay's safety first of all. Her pale-blue eyes, so like her son's, rested lovingly on his face.

"You're sure you're all right, darling?" she questioned him anxiously, as Ted laid Laurel on a couch covered with silk brocade. "It would have killed me if anything had happened to you."

"I'm all right, mother," her son muttered. "I got knocked off the stage when Van Doran hopped up there trying to be a hero."

Hoytie, whose attention had been devoted to the girl, looked up quickly to meet Jay Parkinson's eyes with a glance of unspeakable scorn. To Ted, who stood beside them, clenching his fists in helpless fury, she said quietly:

"She isn't badly burned, I'm sure. She's only fainted from the shock."

When the doctor had made his examination, he reported that a slight burn on the shoulder was the extent of Laurel's injury, and that she would be all right in a few days. She was suffering principally from shock.

As Mrs. Parkinson was mentally determining a course of action, Hoytie ventured to suggest that she and Ted see Miss Spencer safely home. But Jay's mother waved a heavy, white hand in emphatic protest.

"Oh, by no means can she be taken home this evening, my dear Mrs. Emden! I am responsible for her, and she shall stay here."

To every one's surprise, Laurel herself made the final decision. The burn had been dressed and she was resting in a big chair, listening to the discussion.

"I think, if you won't mind, Mrs. Parkinson, I'd rather go home," she said with a meekness that did not deceive the exultant Hoytie. Not even Jay's proposal to drive her in town was accepted.

When all the excitement was over and the Parkinsons, mother and son, were left alone to review the events of the evening and contemplate the ruin of the beautiful little theater, Jay approached his mother fretfully.

"Why couldn't you have fixed it so I could have driven Miss Spencer home? You might have backed me up when I offered to take her. But instead you let Hoytie Emden come in here and run the whole show. She's always sticking her nose in my business—she and that Van Doran. They'll talk, never fear! They'll try to make us look cheap. And they'll say at the office that I'm stuck up, and you're too big a snob to have let a poor girl even stay in your house overnight."

"Why, I'll go and see her to-morrow, dear. It wasn't necessary for her to be kept here. That's a very little thing to make a fuss about, when you look at what *we've* lost!" she moaned.

"You know perfectly that money'll fix up your darned little theater," retorted Jay, still thinking of his lost chance with Laurel. "But I'll tell you, mother, that you've got to ask that girl to come back and stay here for a few days. She'll not be at the office, and people will talk, I tell you, if we don't do something for her!"

Susan Parkinson looked sharply at her offspring, wondering what was in his mind.

"Why are you so interested in that girl?" she asked in as noncommittal a tone as she could manage, to hide her decision of watchfulness.

But Jay was displaying an irritable resolution.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he reiterated, until his mother replied meekly:

"All right, dear! I'll promise to invite her."

Although she kept the letter of her word to her son, the spirit of the invitation extended by Susan Parkinson to Laurel Spencer resulted in the girl's polite, but firm, refusal to return with the Lady Bountiful. As she rolled homeward alone after the interview, Jay's mother smiled contentedly at the success of her first maneuver.

Some days after Laurel had resumed her work at the office the vigilant Jay had his first intimation that Van Doran had followed up his advantage by establishing a definite relation of friendship with her. Jay's coupé had been brought around from the club garage as usual at five o'clock, and he was intending to ask, as he did every evening, if he might drive Laurel home. To avoid disagreeable consequences of his displeasure in the office, she generally accepted; but on this particular evening she declined.

Jay invented a reason for waiting around the office until Laurel was ready to leave. He rode down in the elevator

with her. When she said: "Good night," and walked toward the entrance, Jay dallied at the cigar stand in the lobby of the building, buying tobacco he never intended to smoke. Presently his shadowing was rewarded. Ted van Doran came briskly out of the revolving doors and greeted Laurel.

With this basis for suspicion that he had a rival, Jay only renewed his attentions to Laurel, especially since he no longer saw her at the office during the day. Through the apparently inexplicable workings of fate, Laurel had been removed by the senior partner to another department. But it never occurred to Jay to link his mother and his business associate with fate in this instance.

Driven beyond endurance by increasingly frequent rebuffs, Jay finally reached the limit of his patience, and one bright Sunday morning he drove boldly around to the apartment Laurel shared with another girl.

Admitted to the tiny sitting room, which bore evidence of early-morning household activity, he waited while Laurel swung the folding bed into its place in the wall. Laurel's companion remained prudently out of sight.

When, after some moments of desultory conversation, Jay abruptly offered another proposal of marriage, he exclaimed petulantly:

"I'm determined that I shan't let you refuse me any more. You've had all the sport a girl's supposed to enjoy in turning a man down, and now I'm bound you're going to be serious. For the last time, Laurel, will you marry me?" In his exasperation Jay omitted any terms of endearment, much as he would have left them out of a sharp business letter.

Aggravated by his manner into plain speaking at last, Laurel regarded him unwaveringly.

"I could never marry you, Jay, even if I wanted to. No; wait!" She

frowned to keep him from interrupting. "Your mother has shown too clearly that she'd not accept me as a daughter, and I certainly have no intention of marrying into a family where I wouldn't be welcome."

"Oh, Laure! What nonsense! If that's all!" Jay's face lighted with a confident smile. "If mother will welcome you, will you consent?" he persisted. With all the spoiled boy's assurance of his power to get his own way, he rose energetically, picking up his hat and gloves. "I'll dash home now, but I'll be back as quickly as I can to bring you out to the house for dinner. Would *that* convince you?" Before she could reply, he had left the little room still echoing his breezy goodbye, and was gone.

Blankly she stared at the smooth panel of the door through which her impetuous suitor had just disappeared. But the smile that grew at the corners of her mouth developed first into a nervous giggle, then a peal of laughter as she sank into a cushioned chair in relief, positive that she knew the outcome of Jay's impending interview.

Susan Parkinson had just come in from church when Jay reached the house, leaving his motor in the drive. Two steps at a time he bounded up the broad front stairs and headed for his mother's room.

"Where are you, mother dear? May I come in?" he called eagerly, coming buoyantly into her dressing room without stopping for the permission he had asked.

"You've been out, Jay?" queried his mother placidly. She was busy unscrewing the modest pearl earrings suitable to a churchly atmosphere, intent on replacing them with dangling ornaments of more pagan brilliance. "I'd have taken you to the service with me, if I'd thought you were not sleeping. Dear Mr. Ingram preached so delightfully—oh, how shall I say?—*simpatico* this

morning." On occasions Mrs. Parkinson allowed herself the indulgence of being heavily coy, even with her own son. "And he asked after you so kindly, my dear boy!

"We were discussing again the new silver pieces for the altar. He wanted my advice." Mrs. Parkinson looked deeply into the mirror, turning her head first to one side, then to the other to get the effect of the long earrings. "Do you know, Jay, I'm sorry sometimes that we didn't give a complete altar service in gold instead of that memorial window to your dear father. But I wanted to have something that would be a source of constant inspiration to humble worshippers."

Hardly able to restrain his impatience, but knowing there were times when his mother had to be humored, Jay at last broke in upon her Sabbath reflections.

"Mother, darling. I have the most wonderful news for you!" he began, without noticing that his first words had immediately arrested his mother's attention. Too well she knew that this expression of devotion, coupled with his unusual enthusiasm, always preceded a request of some kind.

"I'm going to be married, dearest. And I know you'll be satisfied with my choice of a golden creature every one admires so much." Jay came cajoling close to his mother. "It only remains for you to welcome her—here, to-day—as your future daughter." The instant Jay's arm went coaxingly about her unyielding shoulder, he sensed her resistance.

Susan Parkinson, with fear in her heart, a stiff smile on her lips and none at all in her eyes, faced her son with outward composure.

"Get married, did you say? A baby like you, Jay?" She laughed brightly. "I never heard of anything more ridiculous!"

Jay's arms dropped to his side. He

turned away, pouting like the baby she had called him.

"I don't think you have any right to treat this as a joke, mother," he protested. "I'm serious about this, I tell you. I'm going to marry Laurel Spencer." The expression of his face had changed to a look of dogged obstinacy.

"Laurel Spencer? Oh! The girl in your office!" Mrs. Parkinson behaved as if she had never spoken the name before. "Oh, now I know you're not serious! You're simply carried off your feet by her beauty." That much she could safely admit, she thought. "And I don't blame you for admiring her, dear. I remember now that she is very lovely. But you'll get over this idea of wanting to marry her. A name like ours mustn't be given lightly, you know." Her tone became stern and admonitory.

"But I will! I will! I'll marry her in spite of you. You can't stop me! I'm a grown man, and you can't dictate to me." Jay all but stamped his foot like a nervous girl.

With infinite patience and restraint, Mrs. Parkinson said persuasively:

"I'm only asking you to be reasonable, Jay. Why, she's not your equal socially, dear. You've really nothing in common."

"But you've made her socially known, mother. She sees all our friends, ever since you got her a membership in the *Trois Artes*."

"I only put her in because you asked me," she reminded him. "Don't you remember? I was willing enough, at the time, because it was to help the club. So many young people were out of town, and we had to give the program as it was scheduled."

Jay looked savagely at his mother.

"Well, you can't make a fool out of me! I've asked Laurel to dinner with us to-day. I've already planned to go back and get her as soon as I told you."

Susan Parkinson was silent. She was

thinking that, if the girl should come on Jay's invitation alone, she would know better what her problem was to be.

"Very well, dear!" The unexpected conciliation of his mother's words filled Jay's heart with new confidence. Just give him time and he'd bring the old girl around, he thought disrespectfully.

However, three quarters of an hour later the Parkinson butler came to the boy's mother with a message.

"Mr. Jay has just called, madame, to say that you need not expect him to dinner."

The following Monday afternoon Ted van Doran was surprised to have Laurel telephone, to ask that he meet her at the Carlton grill, instead of calling for her at the office, as they had arranged.

When they met, his fond gaze dwelt upon her with love and admiration, as always, but to-night it seemed that the radiant beauty of his golden girl was somehow dimmed. While instinctively he was glad to feel that the loveliness which had charmed him was of a spiritual quality, as well, it saddened him to see her so curiously quiet and unresponsive.

"What is it, Laurel dear?" he asked gently, when they were seated at the table. "Does your head ache? Are you tired?"

Slowly she shook her head, but her golden-brown eyes did not meet his earnest gray ones frankly as usual. Laurel caught her breath in a pitiful little sound somewhere between a sob and a sigh.

"I'm all right, thank you, Ted," she answered, looking down at her plate.

All through dinner he could see how bravely she was trying to overcome this depression. But when he had taken his coat and hat from the check-room girl, Laurel made an unexpected request.

"Is there still time to turn in the theater tickets you have for to-night?"

Ted looked at her searchingly. Laurel, refusing to go to the theater?

"Why, of course, dear! But what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing! I just don't think I could stand the theater to-night." She tried to smile, softening her remark by asking if he would not take her for a ride.

When Ted had left the tickets at the agency, and they were settled in his car, he made no effort to talk. Laurel loved him for the gentle understanding that seemed to give this silence between them all the high wonder of a shared mood. On and on they drove until they had left the downtown traffic and were out along a river road that wound upward through a rocky park. At last, in a sheltered spot Ted stopped the car. Very deliberately he turned off the switch and adjusted the brake. Laurel's heart thumped unsteadily.

"Now, Laurel, dear," he said caressingly, when even the tiny light on the dashboard had been dimmed and they were alone in the faint glow reflected from the car's lamps on the water beyond, "there's something that's troubling you very much. Won't you tell me what it is?"

For a few seconds she gave no answer.

"I'm sorry, Ted; but I can't tell you."

When he was silent after that, she wondered if she had hurt him. But he was only thinking; because at the hesitating touch of her hand, laid softly on his arm as if to beg pardon for her failure to give her confidence, he suddenly put his arm about her. With a daring that was oddly compounded of shyness and love and awe, he took off her little brown hat and drew her dear head to rest against his shoulder.

"But you must tell me, Laurel, sweet. Because I love you. I haven't thought of anything else since that night of the fire when I held you in my arms. And there's nothing in the world that I want

so much now as to have you for my wife. Tell me, do you love me, too? Even just enough to let me hope?"

He thought, in that moment, that her head nestled just a bit closer to his heart. But she only said:

"I'm sorry, Ted. I can't. I can't hurt you like that."

"Hurt me, did you say?" He laughed with incredulous joy. "You can make me the happiest man in the world." He pressed his lips against her soft hair. "But you do love me? Only say you do!"

"Yes, Ted! I do love you," she whispered, as though her heart was breaking. "But I can't bring my troubles into your life."

Now he was kissing her passionately, meeting her lips at last in a fervent pledge of bliss.

"Don't you know that you belong to me? That what troubles you, troubles me even more? It should be my right to share everything with you."

"But, Ted! You don't know what has happened. This is too dreadful. I wouldn't want you to stand by my disgrace."

"Disgrace fiddlesticks! You can't tell me there's anything an angel like you could do that would be disgraceful! Now come on," he declared heartily. "Let's have it! Tell me the worst!"

Slowly she stirred in his arms, and pulled a letter from her hand bag.

"You'll have to light the little light." It was strange how comforted she was already, just to have some one who cared enough to ask what worried her.

And after Ted had finished, she was thrilled at his low whistle of astonishment and his exclamation of anger.

"Well, there's nerve for you! Of all the rotten tricks in the world!" He snapped off the lamp and had her once more in his arms, murmuring, "You poor, wee thing! Blessed, blessed love of mine, they shan't hurt you! You

must leave all this to me. I'll take care of it, all right."

But Laurel had drawn away, panicky once more at another thought.

"Ted, dearest! I'd forgotten! What will they think—all your friends, like Mrs. Emden and the rest? I belong in a different world. They'll never understand."

Ted laughed outright.

"Say! That gives me a thought! Hoytie's the very person to see. By George! angel, she'll lap this up. Oh, boy! You needn't worry about what Hoytie Emden'll think. And the only reason she won't learn to adore you as much as I do is because there isn't any one in the whole wide world who *could* love you like I do." And much more of this same sort, punctuated by affectionate endearments and kisses and long, beatific moments of silence.

"Would you care awfully, sweetness," asked Ted, after a while, "if I took you home now and then stopped in to talk this over with Hoytie right away? We really haven't any time to lose."

Fortunately Hoytie was at home, ready as ever to hear how she could be of help. She possessed a rare quality of sympathetic understanding which could immerse her so completely in the troublous affairs of others that after the first telling the difficulty seemed to belong as much to Hoytie as to the individual who sought her advice. Ted's problem, however, she took to herself with particular glee and delight; not often did chance throw such a delicious bit in one's way. As he had hoped, she was quite ready to "lap it up."

Half past ten o'clock the next morning found Hoytie contemplating afresh the wonders of the private museum Susan Parkinson called her drawing-room, until that worthy lady should appear.

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. Emden!" Inwardly Hoytie smiled at the noble air of forbearance from sitting in judg-

ment which characterized Mrs. Parkinson's attitude and tone toward one who represented to the world at large a membership in the smart set, but who in Mrs. Parkinson's opinion was merely fast. She seated herself well forward in a big, tapestried chair—like a chubby Botticello cupid on the edge of a rosy cloud, thought Hoytie rather mischievously.

Enjoying herself thoroughly, Hoytie threw back the collar of her gray kasha cloak, glad to be looking so worldly there in Susan's formal habitat in a gray ensemble with a pert little red hat.

"I'll come to the point of my visit at once, Mrs. Parkinson. It's rather a delicate subject for me to broach, but I believe you'll be as interested as I am in having this matter cleared up."

"Yes?" interrogated Mrs. Parkinson politely. "And what might it be?" Imperceptibly her manner grew warmer, as befitted her position if she was to be taken into Mrs. Emden's confidence as an adviser.

"Well!" hesitated Hoytie, basking in the last moment of calm before the storm. "It seems that a sudden opposition to Miss Spencer's membership in the Trois Artes has arisen. And I've come to tell you why I think the club should be proud to have her continue as one of its leading players."

"But," parried Mrs. Parkinson, with reserve, "may I ask how this concerns me?"

"It concerns you principally because I'm sure you are going to withdraw your opposition. The——"

"My opposition? I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to explain that remark, Mrs. Emden."

Hoytie smiled blandly.

"Gladly, Mrs. Parkinson. One reason this concerns you is that the balance of the members in the Trois Artes—I for one—should have something to say before you post Miss Spencer's name for dismissal. And another is that your

letter to her indicates an uncompromising attitude without any explanation whatsoever."

"Oh! I see! The girl has gone to you with the letter."

"She's done nothing of the sort," answered Hoytie promptly.

"I've come this morning merely to suggest that you write another letter to Miss Spencer stating that there has been a grave mistake on your part, and that you're sorry. Then, if I were you, I'd not post her name, as you have threatened to do."

Gasping with indignation, Mrs. Parkinson rose majestically.

"I never heard of such impertinence! Our interview has gone altogether too far. You will have to excuse me."

"I'm sorry to insist," objected Hoytie, also on her feet. "You are an older woman than I, Mrs. Parkinson, and on that account I have tried to spare you. But I am Miss Spencer's friend now, and you are forcing me to use the evidence I have against your son."

"My son! Against Jay? Why, what has he done to the girl?"

"Nothing—I hope," declared Hoytie, smiling in mild sarcasm in spite of herself. "It's a business matter."

Mrs. Parkinson's grim countenance relaxed.

"I'm afraid that unless you give me the letter for which I've asked, I shall have to instruct my lawyer to proceed with my case against your son."

"Your case?"

Hoytie felt genuinely sorry to see how the blood mounted to Jay's mother's temples.

"Your son is withholding some bonds of mine which I gave him to sell more than two years ago," she said more kindly. "I have been unable to get a settlement. The amount is large, and Jay says he hasn't the money."

"Well, if that's all, I'll see that you get your money."

"I'm sorry. It's not all. I have held

this case back in spite of my lawyer's advice; but now I'm ready to go on with it. To show that I am not bluffing, I have a copy of the form of declaration. Would you like to see it?" Hoytie opened her long envelope purse of red patent leather and took out a paper in its legal covering of blue.

Once more Mrs. Parkinson's manner changed. Almost in tears, she clasped her plump hands in an effort at self-control.

"Oh, Mrs. Emden, this mustn't go on!" she implored. "You couldn't be so cruel as to hurt Jay's name before the whole community and bring disgrace upon us. Can't we come to some amicable understanding?"

"You've just said that you'd settle for the bonds Jay was to have sold. Your check to cover them, and the letter to Miss Spencer will be the only means whereby I could come to an understanding with you," decreed Hoytie.

"Well, under the circumstances, I suppose I shall have to consent," admitted the boy's mother, recognizing defeat. "But what assurance am I to have that you'll not go on with the suit, after all?" she demanded, in a last, haughty hope.

"My lawyer is waiting out in my car. I am sure he will give you that assurance, if you will be good enough to send for him."

Twenty minutes later, with her business affairs consummated with decency and in order, Hoytie prepared to follow her lawyer back to the car.

"It might ease your mind to know also, Mrs. Parkinson," she said, stopping in the doorway and tucking under her arm the red purse that contained a letter and a check, "that Laurel Spencer is going to marry young Ted van Doran. You'll agree, I'm sure, that with such a marriage, her future in society will happily rest no longer upon any question of patronage."



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The Golden Link

By Nancy Cabell

Author of "The Broken Lute,"
"Lorna of the Dunes," etc.

THE blue breast of the bay was flecked and feathered with white as the midmorning wind sprang up, disturbed its lovely calm, sent a fleecy drift of cloud scudding across the azure sky, filled the sail of the catboat so that the trim little vessel skimmed birdlike toward its anchorage in the cove. The older of the two men in the craft, Galvin Hunt, sucked hard upon the briar between his teeth, sighed in deep content.

"Gorgeous, Norry! You've been hard hit, of course, but with all this left to you——"

Young Ransom ducked the boom as they swung about.

"Oh, I know. I shouldn't grouse. But, dash it! Galvin, it's hard to have to give up the big place, even temporarily, and adjust ourselves to the confines of a gardener's cottage on the estate! Stacy's a better sport than I am, frankly. If our tenant, Mrs. Stafford, weren't so charming to us——"

Hunt was able, after two days in the scorned cottage, to round out the young man's meaning. The handsome, vivacious Cora Stafford took pains to include the Ransoms in everything.

"You pull down a handsome rental for the season, of course. But, on the other hand, you and Stacy are able to sponsor her socially. It is worth a great deal to her, in a place like Fanchester! She's from California, isn't she?"

Ransom didn't answer him until he had stepped from the catboat and moored it to the float.

"I believe so." He spoke a trifle irritably. "Why is it that you insist on emphasizing her—Westernness? Cora Stafford is a charming and intelligent woman. Well-bred, obviously. Simply because she doesn't choose to give us all the details of her past, and the ramifications of her family, doesn't imply that she has one and hasn't the other!"

As they ascended the steep incline of the hill—above them, a little to the left, lay the rambling structure of the formidably exclusive yacht club, with tiers of steps leading down to the private beach, dotted with bright parasols—Galvin Hunt, psychologist and authority on the warped impulse, smiled fleetly. But not at the gorgeousness of orange cliffs and rocks, that made the Fanchester coast line the loveliest along the north shore of Massachusetts. It was quaintly consistent to masculinity to emphasize the mental and spiritual qualities of a flamboyantly lovely woman of—well, a little doubtful background. Because Norry was already half infatuated with Cora Stafford's sleepy, velvet-brown eyes, her perfect figure, the reddish gold of her hair, drawn sleekly, Madonnalike, about her lovely, curved cheeks, framing the warm, fruity scarlet of her mouth, he ignored these physical attributes of charm and dwelt upon her wit and breeding! Poor Stacy!

As Norry talked on, a little morosely, of the financial mishap that had resulted in their letting of the magnificent establishment on the hill, his friend wondered whether living in the lodge cottage with one maid was wholly responsible

for Stacy's guarded misery. He had glimpsed it once or twice. Financial worry is devastating, and Norry had spoken of a pressing and immediate need for thousands. And Stacy was a modern young woman. Extremely modern. Quite capable of a heady flirtation of her own! She was, too, very sure of her slim, black-haired loveliness. Still, not even a young modern likes to see her husband impaled by another woman's charm.

He sighed, and ran his thin, brown hand through his graying hair.

"I wish I were a man of means, instead of a poor scribbler, Norry," he said. "But I can dig up a thousand, if that would be of any real help to you in this crisis. My publishers will advance me that on my nearly finished manuscript."

His hand rested on the boy's arm, in kindly fashion. Ransom looked up gratefully.

"You're a good scout, Galvin. It's rather magnificent of you to offer that! I shan't forget, though I shan't accept it. You see, if I can't raise ten thousand more within the next few days, I'm done for, so far as the business is concerned. I've got everything we own mortgaged to the hilt now. But I've a notion that Stacy's Aunt Joan will come through. If she doesn't——"

He scuffed his shoe reflectively in the white pebbles adorning the path.

"It will serve me right for leaving everything in Monteith's hands, of course. Oh, well, if a man plays the fool as I've done, he deserves to shoulder the whole result of such folly. Only I don't like to see Stacy taking my punishment. Here we are. Did she tell you we were lunching with Mrs. Stafford?"

As Hunt scrubbed his well-kept brown hands thoughtfully in the single guest room of the diminutive lodge cottage—his casement window offered a view of the splendid, rambling old place

to which this tiny house belonged—he wondered that Stacy cared to spend so much time in her former home. It must cause her a poignant pang to be a guest in the long, paneled drawing-room where she had entertained for years; to sit halfway down the Sheraton dining table, remembering how she had graced its head. It was getting late. Norry whistled, and presently they were strolling toward the big house through the intervening grounds.

Beyond the terraces Stacy's rose garden had reached the height of its glory, this late June day. Hunt bent over an exquisite tea-rose bush that he did not remember; breathed deep of the delicate exhalation.

"Stacy still looks after her roses," Ransom told him. "She doesn't trust Mrs. Stafford's gardener. These she planted the fall we were married! Lovely things, aren't they?"

Hunt followed his friend across the emerald turf and greeted the handsome woman in green who trailed her floating draperies down the stone steps toward them. She flung Norry an intimate little look, a smile of the eyes, and gave her hand to Hunt.

"You've come at a most momentous moment!" she told them both. "We're chattering inside like magpies. Every locker in the bathhouse was broken into this morning, just after high tide, when every one was on the beach, and the thief made quite a haul. Frightfully exciting, isn't it?"

"What?" Ransom whistled. "I've always thought the idea of leaving valuables loose in the lockers was a fool stunt. How much did you lose?"

Hunt saw her curved lashes flicker as she looked down at her slim, long hands.

"I? Oh! Only that platinum wrist watch I wear all the time. And some jade beads. The looter was catholic in his tastes. But Mrs. Remley wore her pearl choker—she does with everything,

you know—and left it swinging from a hook, with the rest of her clothing. And Kit Marvell's diamond bar pin—it's huge, if you remember—was lifted, together with the two rings she had attached to it, for safe-keeping from the tide. But come in. My luncheon ranks are depleted by the tragedy."

The two men followed her in through the long French windows, and Galvin Hunt received an impression, blurred a little by the chatter that went on about them, of Stacy, standing still and pale in the midst of a little group, almost as if she were at bay. It was speedily dispelled. Galvin Hunt, psychologist, did not accept impressions. He had an interesting theory that the retina of the mind, as well as the retina of the eye, which received the image formed by the lens, receives a fluctuating image, affected and altered by light and shade, by expectancy of the brain behind it, by a thousand things. One sees too much, he thought, and came to stand beside the slim, gray-eyed goddess that was his friend's wife.

"You've heard the thrilling news?"

Her mouth, red and beautiful and always a little embittered, these days, parted, half whimsical, half ironic. He thought that she wasn't nearly the beauty that Cora Stafford was. But there was to her slinness, her pale, oval face, between its demure wings of dark hair of incalculable fineness, an elfin quality of charm that set her apart from other women.

And as he stood there talking to her—this half-elderly, insignificant man with a stoop—he found her the most beautiful thing in the world. Simply because she smiled at him suddenly, narrowing her gray eyes, so cool, so translucent between their thick, black lashes, and laid her hand on his arm.

"You don't like me to be flippant, do you? But Sally Graham went home in a state of complete collapse because her sapphire bracelet was taken. She has

quantities of bracelets and quantities of sapphires, and she can buy as many more as she pleases!"

"Did you lose anything?" he asked as she presented her lovely lips to one of his atrocious and cheap cigarettes.

She shook her dark head.

"Dear Galvin! Don't you know that I toss every piece of jewelry into a safe-deposit box when I come away for the summer? Diamonds are out of place with organdy and cotton crapes! People who wear them as I wear a string of ivory beads, and then leave them in a bathhouse locker, that can be opened with any master key, deserve to be looted!"

She laughed and tucked her hand in his elbow as the half-dozen luncheon guests moved toward the dining room.

"Moreover, if good taste didn't deter me from wearing my bar pins and bracelets down here, save on state occasions, my lowly condition would. Don't you know that when the crash came I disposed of all my jewels?"

He did, of course.

"Simply a charming symbol of marital fidelity, and all that sort of thing."

He caught a new, less soft note in her undertones, and followed her gray gaze.

Under the sweeping arch—Stacy's arch—that divided dining room from long, chintz-hung drawing-room, Cora Stafford posed, Hebelike, offering her cocktail to Norry's willing lips. There was nothing in the gesture that hinted at anything more than camaraderie. But the look that passed between them, that Stacy had intercepted, gave Galvin Hunt a deep and wretched misgiving. "You're a fool, Galvin Hunt, psychologist, and dealer in dark conjecture," he told himself, and they sat down.

Cora Stafford leaned toward him, across the frosty damask, the shining silver.

"Isn't it all exciting?" she cried. "And to think that we have a criminal

psychologist in our midst. Stacy says you've promised to spend a fortnight with her. Perhaps you can solve our mystery, and bring back our pet belongings!"

He had to admit, laughingly, that he knew nothing about the perpetration of the theft, the lay of the elaborate bathhouse, the opportunities it offered. Then, setting down his goblet, he glanced at the women a little impishly.

"You were all on the beach, for instance, using the bathhouse this morning. The thief must have an equally good opportunity, remember!"

His raillery was greeted lightly enough.

Mrs. Tom Marvell, on his other side, answered it, with a lift of her pretty brows. She was a reckless, charming creature.

"Have any of you realized that it must be—one of us? I mean, one member of the dozen establishments on the point here, who use the bathhouse? It wasn't a servant, and it wasn't a stranger. For old Michael, who has been in charge of the showers and so forth for ten years, was at his place during the entire morning." She was speaking directly to Hunt now. "You see, he sits at a desk, of sorts, at the entrance to the bathhouse. Simply to maintain the place against intrusion. The public beach is half a mile down the shore, and people are so stupid. That's really why we installed Michael. He knows us all; he never leaves his post, during bathing hours. No one that doesn't belong to the yacht club, or to the casino, came near the place. You've got to take some starting point, in a thing of this sort. And I'm afraid it will have to be Michael's integrity. I think we're all agreed on that point."

She glanced about, and Hunt conceded that the former gardener could be ranked with Caesar's lady.

He gleaned a good deal of information, all in all—so much that it de-

stroyed any premature hope of an easy solution. Exactly twelve people had dared the icy June waters that morning; no servant, no unknown person had had access to the bathhouse during the hours in which the theft had been accomplished. There had been no imprints of wet feet leading from looted locker to locker.

"Which put a black question mark after my name!" Stacy interrupted clearly. "For I went to the bathhouse, up the short flight to the lockers, after almost everybody was in the surf! Then I saw how late it was. And my suit had blown from its place in the sun and was still wet. Ugh! I wavered, and decided not to swim, after all. Before I strolled down on the beach I could quite easily have ransacked the lockers, disposed of my pelf, and then joined Kit and Tommy Grayling on the sands."

She laughed.

"There you have motive and opportunity. Heaven knows I need eight or ten thousand, at the moment!"

Mrs. Stafford laughed too, her rich, throaty laughter.

"Isn't it quaint? But don't be led astray by your romantic hostess, Mr. Hunt. The thief didn't have to leave dripping footprints, even if he or she had been in the surf. For the sun on the sands is hot, and one dries off swiftly, even if one doesn't leave dry slippers to step into after wading in to shore, as I do!"

"Was no one missed for an appreciable length of time?" asked Hunt, enjoying his excellent luncheon. "This soufflé is really superb!"

Tommy Grayling, a nice and exceedingly rich youth, cocked his crisp, blond head on one side, and halted a violent flirtation with Flo Remley.

"That's the devil of it, Mr. Hunt! Remember that we were all diving in, playing ball around the float, swimming off by ourselves, sun bathing on the

beach. I couldn't be even reasonably sure where any one person was during the whole of those two hours, and I don't believe any one else could, either!"

"Any one of us could have slipped off, and returned!" Mrs. Stafford said, round eyed. "Heavens! I came back to the bathhouse before any one else did, I'm sure. Because of my party, naturally. And I didn't say anything about missing my beads and wrist watch, because I wasn't sure! I thought I might have intended to wear both, and then left them on my dresser. But when Sally Graham came in next, and shrieked out that her diamond-and-sapphire bracelet was gone——"

Galvin Hunt looked at the six people at the table amusedly.

"Were the police notified? At how much, roughly, would you estimate the loss?"

A moment later he jotted down the sum arrived at—twelve or fifteen thousand dollars—as he smiled at Stacy's witty description of the local constable.

Kitty Marvell leaned forward.

"Do find out who the thief is! I didn't plunder you all, but I'm horribly aware of my bridge debts, which I don't dare confide to my husband. Why, half of us might be tempted—horribly tempted! We simply can't go eying each other, and wondering. Are you all game?"

There was a frightened little chorus of assent.

"I'm quite willing to help you all I can," murmured Stacy Ransom, and looked at Hunt queerly. "Even though you all know that we're up against it, financially; that twelve thousand dollars might alter our whole life. I'm being quite frank. No doubt some of you who are aware of Norry's dilemma have already linked me to the theft!"

Her lovely mouth curved as a slow tide of crimson surged up over Flo Remley's plump neck, mounted to her cheeks, that looked a little loose in spite

of the hours she gave to the ministrations of her Swedish maid.

"Why do you talk such rot?" demanded Norry Ransom savagely.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" chanted Stacy, in her clear, sweet little voice. Then she turned to Galvin Hunt peremptorily. "You'll have to do this, now, on my account! You've got to find the man or woman who took those rings, the sapphire bracelet, the pearl choker!"

He twirled the stem of his goblet, looking down into the crystal cube of ice, that his near-sighted, soft-brown eyes might not betray the almost sickening moment of fright that had passed over him.

"All I can do is let the thief give himself away. He always does. No man or woman can help linking himself to his deeds—all of them. It's rather inevitable, to me. And my theory"—he spoke almost apologetically, this notable man of letters—"is simply that of cause and effect. There is the motive, the crime, the result. Clews often lead in different directions; they're a sort of chaff, blown to our very feet by the winds of chance. But the link—the link unconsciously shown us by the guilty person, the link that will inextricably bind together the motive, the deed, its result—it is always offered to our blind eyes by the man who knows too much, and must eventually give himself away!"

He smiled at his own insistent fervor, and they all rose at Mrs. Stafford's signal. Only the Ransoms and Galvin Hunt stayed long. Galvin and Stacy wandered down among her beloved roses. He was responsible for that, because he didn't want her to see Ulysses listening to the song of the sirens. Mrs. Stafford was in the drawing-room, at Stacy's piano, touching the ivory keys lightly, just often enough to accompany the old love song she sang. And while he, Hunt, talked to the woman of his guarded dreams as they strolled among the fragile bloom of her garden, she

was only remembering, with a bitterness that he could not fathom, Cora Stafford, brilliantly beautiful against the sea-green hangings, exchanging an intimate, lingering look, that told of many things, over the brim of her glass, with Norry, whose dear head was very close to hers.

Stacy thought Norry's friend did not guess the grief in her heart. She didn't know that her black-lashed, lovely eyes expressed, like sea water, the turbulence of her elemental nature. And so, when he suddenly slashed savagely at her tea roses, pale and sedate as exquisite ladies, and as fragile, she cried out in sharp dismay.

He watched her as she dropped to her knees, stripped of all her cynicism, only tender now, to snip off the abused blossom. Her small hands, tanned by the sea and the sun, but soft and somehow slight, like a child's, hovered lovingly over the roses.

"They're so sweet!" she apologized. "If you love flowers, that is! So like adorable, prim children! I can't bear to see them hurt or neglected."

He wanted to say: "And I can't bear to see you hurt and neglected, dear, beautiful thing! When you're capable of any sacrifice for the one you love."

But of course he couldn't. He only said: "Sorry!" aloud, abstractedly, and damned the universe beneath his breath.

Hunt couldn't sleep that night. That was how he happened to be at his door, his hand on the knob, with the idea of creeping down to the narrow, book-lined living room, to choose a volume to peruse. But he was stayed by a knock, sharp, and startlingly near. He remembered how thin the walls of the cottage were, and that Stacy's room—and, he had supposed, Norry's—lay just beyond his.

But it was Stacy who knocked upon the door, so, quite evidently, she no longer shared the only large chamber in

the toy house. He had no intention of eavesdropping, but he couldn't help hearing her say:

"I've had no chance to tell you before, but we're salvaged. Aunt Joan is sending me the money within two days.

She should have walked straight into his arms. They should have kissed and clung, wholly united by this providential act. And Norry only uttered a shaky sigh.

"I—see." Then he added formally: "It was very good of you."

Silence. Galvin Hunt, at his window where he stood, fists thrust deep into the pockets of his dressing gown, sketched in the characteristic little lift of her proud, dark head. Then:

"Good night," she said softly, and he heard her light tread pass his door.

Poor, proud Stacy! So Joan Ladd, stingy to penury in spite of her millions, that Stacy should inherit, had helped them out of their difficulties, even though she didn't like Norris Ransom, considered him a wastrel and an idler.

But was it possible that, with the irony of all fatalities, this extended aid had come just too late?

Hunt was wretched.

But he was infinitely more perturbed the next morning, when he was left alone to putter about the tiny garden of the toy house. Norry had gone in town to his offices, to confer, to promise, to head importunate creditors off for a few days more. Stacy was at a lawn divertimento, in which she had a booth, for charity's sweet sake. She had come down to breakfast late, looking a little worn, less lovely than usual. Hunt had fancied that tears had tracked her cheeks during the night. But a certain gallantry would not permit her to stay at home—not after the episode of the looted lockers!

It was just before lunch that the telegram arrived for her. The maid of all work, wiping her sudsy pink hands, all crinkled from hot water, on her kitchen

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apron, went to the door, signed for it, and presented it to Hunt.

"But it's for Mrs. Ransom," he murmured.

"Them things should be opened," she snuffled dismally. "What with accidents and such——"

Stacy had said:

"Look out for me, Galvin dear."

He ripped open the yellow envelope. The blue letters flickered before his eyes.

Impossible grant your request stop consider your expenditures foolish in extreme and recent adversity no more than axiom cause and effect.

J. LADD.

He crumpled the thing in his hand. Then Stacy had lied out of whole cloth when she told Norris that her aunt was salvaging them! If she wasn't, who was? She had promised Norry the money within two days. It was preposterous, awful! In a desperate moment could she have found herself alone in the locker room of the bathhouse, remembering the costly baubles worn by almost every woman on the beach—baubles protected by nothing stronger than a wooden door, a not-too-intricate lock? Baubles that meant her salvation? That meant—Norry!

If life had gone on smoothly, luxuriously, if Cora Stafford and her resplendent wealth—the source of which was vague enough to be dubious, he thought—had never been thrust into Norry's focus, he would have gone on adoring Stacy.

But Mrs. Stafford was a splendid symbol to him of everything they had lost.

And Stacy, a little worn, thinner than she should have been, wearing last summer's clothes, managing badly with an ill-trained servant, not knowing how to order cheap cuts, serviceable roasts, succeeded only in creating an obnoxious life. They shouldn't have stayed in Fanchester, of course. The agonizing struggle to keep up with their friends

was soul sickening. Oh, he could understand!

He pondered upon the situation during his lunch, of limp salad and an overdone chop that was stringy. He smoothed out the telegram, replaced it in its envelope, and when a weary Stacy came home from the lawn fair, he gave it to her with a word of apology.

"Your handmaiden thought it might be urgent, so I opened it."

She read it through with a bitter little twist to her charming mouth.

"Urgent? It couldn't be more so. So that's that! I rather thought her response would not be heartening!"

They were lying in long, wicker chairs on the tiny porch, and the odors of dinner drifted toward them. Stacy, her fine profile pale against the dusk, picked nervously at the flowers on her leghorn hat, which lay upon her knee.

"Are things—in a bad way?" he asked, and dared not lay his hand upon hers, lest it betray his supreme folly.

She smiled at him.

"Dear Galvin! You worry so about us, don't you, now that we're heading for the rocks. Don't. We're not worth it, any of us! Besides, we're not as badly off as we might be. I—I think I can raise the money Norry needs so terribly. In fact, I know I can. The means——"

She looked at him suddenly, and her clear, beautiful eyes were full of her hurt.

"I feel—dishonored by it!" she cried softly. "But Cora Stafford has taken everything of mine! I've the right of defense, haven't I?"

"Stacy!" he cried miserably. "Last night I heard you——"

"You've seen—you know! How much, I wonder! And I'm not hurting any one."

"Except yourself!" he reminded her, leaping to the only conclusion he could.

"Honor's such an empty word," she mourned. "When the opportunity

came—it was thrust upon me; I didn't seek it! I took it. But now I'm frightened."

Her small, sun-browned hands went out to him.

"I'll do anything I can, Stacy."

"Then don't betray me to Norry—about Aunt Joan's refusal, I mean. Let me help him, in my own way. Let me keep him!"

"I don't think you realize——" he began.

"I realize everything! I realize the bigness of the stakes so much more than you can," she told him.

And Norry, who had come by an earlier train, and had been lounging for an hour on the luxuriously furnished terrace of the house that breathed of Cora Stafford now, consuming gin rickeys of estimable quality, strolled across the grounds.

He was in high good humor. He touched the soft, dark curl that would stray from the sleekness of Stacy's hair, and caress her cheek as if it loved to be there, and dropped to the steps beside them.

"I've been helping Cora plan her birthday party. The notion may have been born of the flagon, but it's a good one. Did she tell you about it?"

Stacy nodded.

"Oh, yes. It's to be a fancy-dress affair. Elaborate but impromptu! Quite clever of her. People will think it informal, and come; when they get there in their jeweled glory they'll be impressed, and rather pleased!"

She let Hunt touch a match to her cigarette, blew sharp little puffs of smoke against the dusk.

"Sometimes pussy says 'meow, meow!' and sometimes——" Norry bantered. "Oh, did you tell Galvin that Aunt Joan came through like a gentlewoman? I faced all the directors with aplomb, and, since the interest will be paid by the end of the week, the note is renewed"

Hunt, acutely conscious of the

crumpled slip of yellow paper in his pocket, nodded unhappily.

"He knows," murmured the girl.

Stacy rose with one lithe movement, hands pressed to her cheeks.

"I'm going upstairs."

He stayed her.

"Anything turn up about those jewels that were lifted yesterday?"

"Nothing!" It was a single, staccato word—her response. Then she laughed, and looked at Hunt. "Unless Galvin has found the link? Have you?"

Was it a challenge? He felt her tenseness communicate itself to him.

"Perhaps I'm not sufficiently interested," he murmured deprecatingly.

"I wish to Heaven you'd find the culprit!" Norry told him. "What Stacy said yesterday is true. People have such vile minds; it's quite likely that Flo Remley, and others of her ilk, do suspect Stacy. It's abominable!"

"It's absurd," said Hunt, but his tongue felt dry against his teeth.

Two more days, the second brightened by a dance at the yacht club after dinner. Flo Remley, who hated Stacy for her figure, for her porcelain skin, for her flair for men—she could crook her small, brown forefinger, and draw them about her effortlessly—behaved, as Stacy said afterward judicially, like an overfed, ill-tempered Persian!

Cora Stafford came late, and affixed herself to Stacy and her party. She was very clever, thought Hunt. Clever enough to present the appearance of standing by her friend in spite of talk! Too clever not to realize that her obvious, overdone loyalty implied a hideous thing!

Galvin Hunt was very thoughtful that evening. He didn't dance, and it was his good fortune to overhear a snatch of conversation between the woman he intuitively resented, and Norry.

"Sorceress of the Nile!" said Norry,

who had busied himself about the punch bowl for some time.

Cora Stafford laughed; went on.

"In consequence, my glory will consist chiefly of bangles and anklets, and a square yard or so of bronze-metal cloth, for convention's sake!"

"Now I know what to give you for your birthday!" Norry murmured thickly. "But I'm going to exact payment for it now."

There was a hushed little struggle, a stifled gasp, and silence. And then a lazy little sigh of contentment.

Hunt stood graven in the shadow. He saw that it was Norry who moved uncertainly beneath the weight of those white, perfect arms linked about his head; it was Norry who stirred from the violent embrace, detached himself and became an entity once more!

"You know you wanted me to kiss you," he told the woman, and passed his hand over his eyes. "Oh, Heaven!"

Hunt melted into the darkness, reappearing in the ballroom. Grief and triumphant relief battled within him. He knew that Cora Stafford was no more than an infatuation, from which Norry withdrew, shuddering. A dangerous woman, that! With all her pretenses of friendship for Stacy!

He didn't dance, and he was anxious to slip away.

Half an hour later he strolled the short distance home, alone.

Fanchester lay still as a painted backdrop beneath a perfect moon. The houses, the lawns, every leaf and blade stood out with a startling, an amazing clarity. And the incoming tide beat with a splendid, monotonous music against the cliffs.

He paused before the driveway of the big, white house. It was quicker to cut through the gardens and the long, terraced lawn. The turf, beautifully kept, was light and springy beneath his thin soles. The June air was sweet, almost too sweet, from the breath of the

roses beyond the little stone fountain, where Cupid sported.

He stopped, with a little exclamation of dismay. The small, pale-yellow blossoms he had admired only the other day were in bad condition. This single plant seemed to be almost dead. The leaves drooped. The yellowish buds seemed touched by some insidious blight! Queer! For Stacy's roses blossomed for her almost lovingly. He remembered, with a dry little smile at the sentimental tinge to his thoughts, that this had been planted just after she and Norry had so romantically eloped and married. This had begun the garden that had always been her pride. And now it was perishing, from some subtle, inner decay!

He stared down it, thinking of many things, and suddenly his practiced eye scrutinized the earth from which the plant blossomed. What the devil! He spread his handkerchief, and knelt.

The thing had been uprooted! To careful scrutiny there still remained traces of spade and trowel. Why? It had been in perfect condition, and Stacy would not be likely deliberately to wreak vengeance upon her beloved roses! Who would have dug it up, then carefully replaced it?

Some one who did not know the first principles of rose gardening. Some one who was hurried while trying to conceal something.

Hunt was fastidious. He didn't enjoy digging into the black loam with his carefully kept hands, but nevertheless he did. The rosebush, torn from its soil, lay pitifully against the upturned sod. And Hunt saw why its plant life had been so imperiled. Some fool who should have known better had planted, just at its roots, a little wooden box. The spade that had been used had dug into the roots.

Hunt stared down at the box in his hands, his pulses humming expectantly. Then he slid back the cover in its

groove. A platinum wrist watch; a pearl choker, gleaming smooth and round, milk white, a twinkling bangle.

Here lay the stolen trinkets! In Stacy's rose garden, beneath her bush.

Bad! And yet— Hunt carefully replaced the earth, the uprooted bush, and flattered himself, five minutes later, that he had made a much better job of it than his predecessor had done.

He had two particular things to think about. The first was the hiding place of the jewels—strange choice of a secret repository to a woman who knew plant life as Stacy did! The second was the equally odd coincidence that Stacy had that morning given a large sum of money to Norry, while the jewels were still consigned to their burial place in the garden! Quite obviously, she had gotten the money from another source.

He was still lost in thought when Norry and Stacy came home.

Three days later Cora Stafford's costume party occurred.

Stacy never went to parties early. She insisted that the first two hours must be dedicated to limbering the clumsy thing up! But this night she herded her husband and her guest to their rooms shortly after dinner, and vanished herself to reappear in the flowered silks of a lady of the Tuileries.

Powder and paint and patches transfigured her from a tired woman of thirty to her old, carefree loveliness. And ironically she curtsied to the compliments of the two men.

"Don't lay it on too thick, Norry. I usually do manage to look fairly well, you know!" she murmured impishly. "Not up to Cora's Bloom, of course."

He crimsoned, and bolted sulkily.

She laughed shakily.

"Poor Norry! I shouldn't twit him about his inamorata, should I? Go in, and be my ambassador!"

Gloomily he followed his young friend into the next room. He was a

quiet man, and Norris was too much absorbed in the thing he was examining to hear him enter. He lifted his head suddenly as Hunt spoke.

"Very handsome!"

He was bending over a white, satin-lined case, that he had taken from the pocket of his dinner coat. Inside it lay a slave bracelet of beaten gold. Not the narrow, fragile chain, but a massive, barbaric manacle, exquisitely carved.

"For Cora, I presume."

Hunt picked it up, weighed it reflectively.

"It's her birthday," defended Norry, still sulky. "Not too heavy, is it? She has the most superb arms."

Hunt stroked his upper lip reflectively, a far-away look in his eyes.

"A charming notion!" he said dreamily. "You're going to give it to her to-night?"

"If I get a chance! Hang it all!" Ranson reddened again. "There's no reason why I should give her a birthday gift. I want you to understand that, Hunt. But I got tight the other night, and hinted at something of the sort, and she's mentioned it once or twice since."

Hunt made a swift gesture.

"Do, by all means! You haven't told her—or Stacy, I suppose? No, of course not. But you can slip it on her arm when the opportunity offers."

He laughed aloud.

"I may be able to offer the opportunity."

There was a rustle of silk. Stacy faced them, smiling, gallant.

"Ready?" she drawled.

It was all rather gorgeous. Lights, colored lights, that gave a mysterious sheen to everything, swinging from cunningly concealed wires on the lawn. An expensive orchestra, a crowded ballroom. Quantities of champagne.

And that essence of abandon that only a costume party has!

Midnight was hilarious. Cora Stafford had established herself in the exclusive colony as a thoroughly successful hostess. But she hadn't had any opportunity for twosing. For, oddly enough, Galvin Hunt had dogged her with a certain shy insistence that amused her.

And then, a little after one, in the shifting, bright panorama of the dance floor, it happened.

Norry Ransom had hedged the lovely Cleopatra against the wall; was talking to her earnestly. Her attention was not altogether his, for she was trying to place a certain bulky figure in a domino who moved persistently about. She didn't see Galvin Hunt hovering close to them.

Suddenly, while the jazz reached a crescendo, the lights went out.

That murmuring blackness was very terrifying. Cora Stafford felt something brush her shoulder. She never knew that it was a boy's ardent lips. Then, in the darkness, broken by rustling, by hysterical laughter and whispers, she felt something else—something cold as steel, leaden heavy, massive beyond resistance, click upon her right wrist. And she uttered a frightful scream, as she raised her beautiful, weighted arm to strike out like a trapped wild thing for freedom.

"Take it off, damn you!" she shrieked. "You've nothing on me, nothing!"

The lights went on. They blazed most cruelly of all upon the splendid, bangle-laden beauty crouching against the wall, manacled arm ready to strike!

Galvin Hunt spoke first.

"Constable, you'd better place this woman under arrest for the theft of a week ago. You're lucky, all of you. She was undoubtedly planning larger coups. I happen to have already resurrected the stolen gems from their burial place in Mrs. Ransom's garden."

He looked pained at the villification and abuse that flowed from the erst-

while Mrs. Stafford's lovely lips. For she had looked down, and she saw upon her wrist no manacle of steel, but a slave bracelet, a love token of massive, carved gold.

She began to laugh.

Much later, Hunt was explaining in the tiny drawing-room of the cottage how he had made his discovery.

"It was the fading of your rosebush, Stacy; and when I found the jewels in a box beneath the roots, I knew you were not the thief. It was some one who didn't know the habits of plants, you see. And then, when I learned that you hadn't gotten money from your aunt, nor from the sale of the jewels, I decided that you must be getting it elsewhere! You couldn't endure the woman we know as Cora Stafford. Why, then, should you see so much of her, help her establish herself here? I pieced everything together, added a bit, and knew that you had sold yourself to her, socially, for the summer. It would have proved invaluable to her, in her—ah—professional capacity!"

Norry tightened his arm about the girl at his feet.

"And so, when I saw the golden slave bracelet, I promised myself that she would link herself to the theft this very night. Forgive this foolish boy for his folly, won't you?"

She only looked up at him, in infinite tenderness.

He bent and kissed her, twisting Galvin Hunt's elderly heart mercilessly.

"You should, darlin'," he told her. "For the bauble, after all, was Hunt's 'golden link!'"

Galvin Hunt suppressed a little sigh, and rose.

He undressed slowly. And presently, he seemed to hear what he had been waiting for, for he smiled, and clicked off his light.

It was a single, meaningless sort of sound—the closing of a single door.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

WHAT reader has not felt, on coming on some particularly delectable passage, the impulse to call out to the nearest person: "Here! Listen to this!" This is the impulse that moves us when we select the tales that go to make up the issues of AINSLEE'S—the wish to share with you, AINSLEE'S readers, the delightful experience we have had in coming upon these stories.

But never have we felt the impulse more strongly than on this occasion. It is our happy lot to introduce to you a novel that held us spellbound from the first page to the last, written on the most eternally enticing theme known to romancers—the fascination of the purely feminine woman, the purely charming woman, for the opposite sex; the glamour that does not depend on intellect, or character, or beauty, and yet is curiously compounded of all three, and some other quality that has never been analyzed.

E. W. HORNUNG in his enchanting story of the lovely Mrs. Lascelles does not analyze it. He does better. He presents the lady to our delighted and captivated eyes—actually a charming creature, catching the imagination, holding the heart, moving with a curious and arresting grace through the strange circumstances of her life.

Defly the author sets the stage for her appearance, putting before Duncan Clephane a difficult and embarrassing situation to be met and question to be solved:

WHAT would you do if the woman you loved and lost many years ago called on you to rescue her most precious possession—her son—from the toils of a glamorously fascinating widow of dubious background? What would

you do—supposing you took on the ungrateful task—when you found that the boy trusted you and leaned on you, and that the widow was one of the most charming women you had ever met?

Could you delude yourself that you were cutting a gallant figure? Or, like the hero of Browning's poem who, in a similar situation chose a similar way out, would you confess yourself to be "no hero?"

This was the dilemma that faced Duncan Clephane when, on the star-hung terrace of an Alpine hotel, by the flaring light of a match, he caught a glimpse of the flamboyant beauty of Mrs. Lascelles, a loveliness so brilliant—but of what use is it to attempt to describe the lady who adorns the pages of the best novel ever published in AINSLEE'S—"No Hero," by E. W. Hornung? We will leave you to meet her at first hand in her place at the beginning of the October issue.

BUT she is only the introduction to many other charming people to be met in the October AINSLEE'S. In this issue Izola Forrester's "Conjuror's Lady" concludes her adventures; there will be a story by O. Henry, a thoroughly diverting tale of "The Perils and Pitfalls" of the big city by Joseph C. Lincoln, and many other stories to hold your interest.

BUT it seems to us that at the end of the list you will turn again, as we do, to Mrs. Lascelles, wondering at the hold she takes on your imagination, wondering, as Clephane does, what secret power it is that she possesses to fill the mind and captivate the senses, and draw back the thoughts of those who seek to leave her.

We commend to you most heartily "No Hero."

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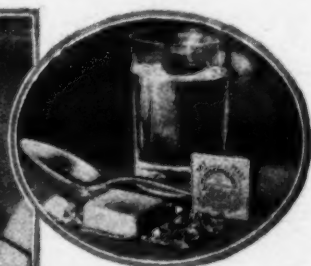
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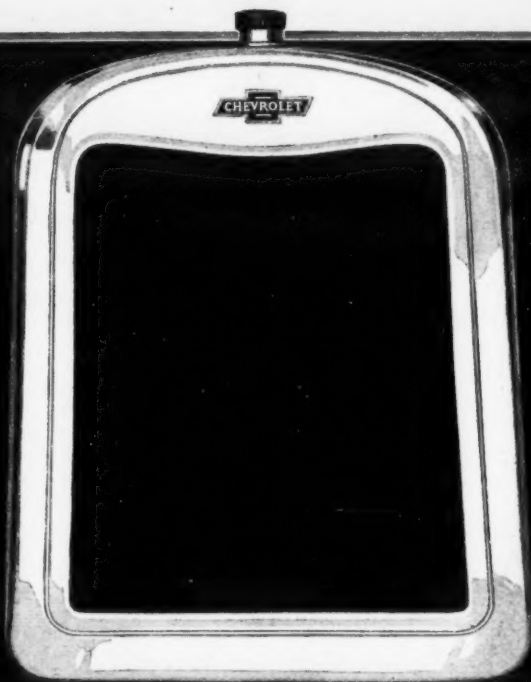
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Tu-be or not Tu-be?

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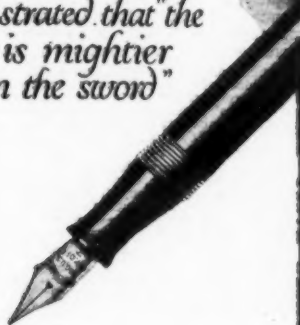


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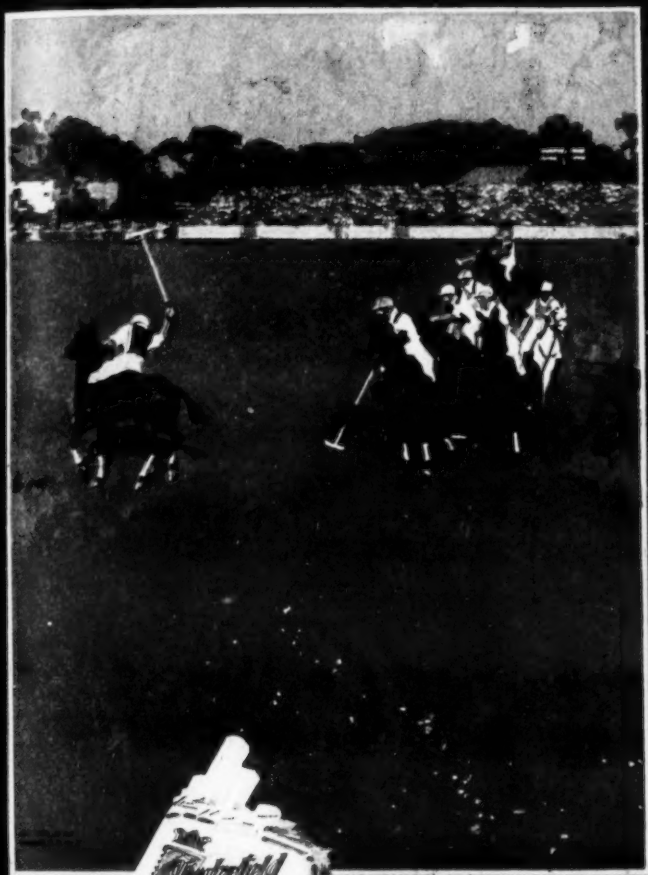
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